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Decline in the prices of agricultural products during great harvest has not been the only factor contributing to farmers' low income. Product quality is also a major factor in getting a higher price for agricultural products. Indeed farmers expect the best from their crops and work their best in all stages of cultivation to achieve that, from using the best seeds to taking care of plants infested with diseases and pests.

However, despite good quality of agricultural products, farmers and traders often fail to maintain the good quality of the products when they reach the hands of the consumers. Drastic decline in quality may occur during storage as well as distribution, which results from inappropriate handling during storage and distribution by farmers or traders.

In addition to post-harvest handling, the ways farmers market their products also influence the sale price. Most farmers are still handling the sale of their agricultural products on their own or individually. They have not joined any collective marketing efforts in the absence of any group capable of facilitating them in collective marketing or due to their lack of awareness of the benefits from collective marketing.

Post-harvest handling and collective marketing have sometimes been overlooked as they are considered non-production activities related. Therefore, in this June issue, the newsletter will raise both issues as the main topics. In this edition, readers will find different information from various points of view and efforts related with post-harvest handling and marketing of agricultural products.

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Seizing the Market through Post-harvest handling

Agricultural products are living products, meaning that they respire, become shrivelled, and finally rot. The long process of distribution makes the quality of agricultural products lower when they are received by consumers than when they are just harvested. Unfortunately, this often happens and cannot be avoided. Bruises during storage and distribution also quicken damage to fresh produce.

Bruises, shrivelling, and dirt in agricultural products are some of the causes for the inaccessibility of modern markets for local agricultural products. Consumers are also more attracted to agricultural products that look fresher, cleaner, and have similar appearances.

To reduce the risk of damage, both farmers and traders should apply good and proper agricultural products post-harvest handling. Proper post-harvest handling can slow down decay of agricultural products, prevent collisions during distribution and improve their appearance.

Reducing the level of damage to agricultural products means improving farmers' income. With good post-harvest handling, more agricultural products can be produced in better quality and sold at better prices. It is not impossible that farmers get better offers for such good quality of products.

Reducing damages and improving the market of agricultural products also mean reducing agricultural waste. Therefore, it also means that good post-harvest handling contributes to reducing the impacts of global warming. Piles of decaying organic produce, including agricultural waste, can lead to the production of methane. Methane is a type of gas that can easily trap heat and is the most to be concerned about in climate change mitigation efforts.

There are many forms of post-harvest handling available but not every practice is applicable for all commodities. Each type of commodity has different textures and characteristics that determines their vulnerability to different causes of decay. Proper post-harvest handling is essential for each different commodity.

Agricultural products processing

Agricultural product processing is different from post-harvest handling although some stages are similar. Agricultural product processing produces products that are completely different from their original forms and are usually consumable, for instance soybeans that are processed into tempe, fruits that are processed into fruit chips, or milk into cheese.

Some products can be produced using simple technology. For that reason, the government has

been intensively promoting farmers to process their agricultural products and sell them as ready-to-consume products. Agricultural product processing is also one of the strategies for preventing waste of agricultural products during great harvest or when there is a drastic decline in the prices of agricultural products.

Processed products have longer shelf life than their original forms. In addition, processed products give opportunities to farmers to enter different markets a

where design and the uniqueness of packaging play a significant role to the products' prices.

Agricultural products can benefit from the advantages of both post-harvest handling and agricultural product processing to be able to enter wider markets. However, how they can get the best benefit from the advantages depend on how agricultural post-harvest handling and processing are performed. Imprudent efforts will not lead to the best results.

Insight Merapi



Farmers in the Slopes of Mount Merapi Have Established the Forum of Cooperation for Marketing of Agricultural Products

During the education and training event on the development of markets for agricultural commodities on 27-28 April 2018 in Surakarta, 48 participating farmers from 5 sub-districts in 3 districts established a forum for improving and strengthening cooperation among farmers from different regions. They are horticulture farmers in the slopes of Mount Merapi.

For these farmers, marketing of agricultural products is still one of their major issues. So far, prices have always been set by consumers or middle persons. Farmers do not have strong bargaining position since most of them still manage the sale of their products on their own or individually. Quality monitoring, therefore, has also been in most cases overlooked. Such marketing practices have long been adopted that the markets start to lose interest in their products.

With the establishment of the forum, farmers hope to improve the quality control of agricultural products from Merapi areas as well as to strengthen farmers' bargaining position through collective sales scheme. On the same occasion, the members of Paguyuban Petani Merapi (Merapi

Farmers Forum) formulated a number of strategies for improving access to markets for agricultural products from Merapi areas, including mapping on potential agricultural products of Merapi areas and information exchange on the prices of agricultural products at the farmers' level. The forum covers not only horticulture products but also other commodities that farmers grow in the slopes of Merapi, including coffee, flower, tobacco, and so on.

The Chair of the Forum, Sumardi, expressed his hope that the forum would help farmers to break their dependency on buying and using chemical fertilisers and on debt to buy agricultural inputs. He believed that farmers are capable of producing their own agricultural inputs.

The Merapi Farmers Forum will consist of farmers in the Mount Merapi landscape, especially from the districts of Boyolali, Klaten, and Magelang. Therefore, the chair of the forum will be supported by three deputies who will each responsible for their respective district and one coordinator for each village.



Food Loss: Challenges to Sustainable Landscape

Not all food can get to the table. Some are damaged or spoiled before they reach the consumers. Damage to food that happens after harvest is called food loss. Food loss can happen during post-harvest handling, distribution, processing, and also consumption.

Although accurate number of food loss is not available, the fact that some food is lost has indicated that some energy, land, and other resources have been lost and “created” waste. Without proper management, piling food and agricultural waste can contribute to aggravating global climate change. The high rate of food loss is also indeed putting more burdens to agriculture to provide food.

Every commodity has its own different characteristics of ingredients; hence the different causes and risks of food loss. Simple but proper post-harvest handling can reduce damage to agricultural products and food loss. However, increased demand for food and limited resources raises the necessity for more efficient post-harvest handling.

However, farmers alone cannot reduce food losses. Other actors should provide their support by building the capacity and skills of farmers in post-harvest handling practices; providing more efficient technologies, equipments and machines; developing market, and other approaches.

