

Research Article

Community Perspectives on Farm-to-Market Challenges Affecting Copra Production in Tupi, South Cotabato, Philippines: A Descriptive Survey Study

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<https://doi.org/10.70847/739988>

Article history:

Received: 12 May 2026

Revised: 17 June 2026

Accepted: 23 July 2026



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Abstract

This descriptive survey study examines community perspectives on farm-to-market challenges affecting copra production and marketing in the Municipality of Tupi, South Cotabato, Philippines. Using a structured questionnaire administered to 50 farmers, vendors, traders, cooperative members, transport workers, government employees, residents, and students selected through convenience sampling, the study analyzes key production and marketing constraints, perceived benefits of farm-to-market roads, and preferred interventions using weighted mean computations. Results indicate that unstable copra prices, high transportation costs linked to inadequate road conditions, and limited drying and storage facilities are the most pressing constraints identified by respondents. Participants perceive farm-to-market roads as critical for reducing hauling costs, decreasing spoilage, and improving access to markets and buyers, thereby supporting income stability. The findings underscore the need for targeted infrastructure investments, financial assistance, and establishment of local buying centers to strengthen the copra value chain and inform local government planning and policy-making.

Keywords: Copra industry, Farm-to-market roads, Copra value chain, Coconut farmers, Community perception

1. Introduction

South Cotabato is widely recognized for its agricultural production, including coconut, pineapple, rice, and coffee, which underpins its reputation as the "Food Basket of the South." In the municipality of Tupi, copra production constitutes a key livelihood source for local farmers and vendors, yet producers face persistent challenges such as price fluctuations, limited bargaining power, and inadequate pre- and post-harvest facilities. Recent infrastructure projects, including farm-to-market roads implemented under national rural development initiatives, have sought to enhance market access and reduce post-harvest losses. However, empirical evidence on how community members perceive remaining constraints and the effectiveness of such interventions in the copra value chain at the municipal level remains limited. Given these pressing conditions, it is essential to assess the underlying factors that affect copra production to ensure the long-term viability of the sector.

The findings of this study may serve as a benchmark for improving agricultural programs, strengthening farmers' cooperatives, and informing responsive local laws and policies that promote fair trade and sustainable production practices. With the rising global supply and demand for coconut products, the industry has become vital to producer countries' economies. In 2022, coconut production totaled 62.41 million metric tons (MMT) from 11.05 million hectares of plantations based on FAO data, peaking in 2018, slightly declining in 2019 and 2020, then increasing by 2.1 percent in 2021. Despite a flat trend in 2022, global coconut production is projected to reach 65.4 MMT by 2026, with a steady 0.5 percent annual growth from 2021 (Rosantrater, 2024).

The importance of copra to the Municipality of Tupi has been further underscored by recent industrial developments. A local company, Tupi Supreme Activated Carbon Incorporated, has invested approximately three billion pesos (₱3 billion) in a production facility that will process coconut oil into biodiesel, aligning with the Department of Energy's implementation of the Biofuels Act of 2006, which mandates the gradual increase of coco methyl ester (CME) blends in motor fuels (MindaNews, 2024). The growing demand for coconut-based products creates new opportunities for farmers to benefit from improved market access and better farmgate prices; however, these opportunities can only be maximized through efficient logistical systems, particularly reliable farm-to-market roads that reduce hauling expenses, minimize post-harvest losses, and enable timely transport of goods to processing centers and markets. Farm-to-market road (FMR) projects in Tupi have demonstrated significant contributions to agricultural productivity and rural livelihoods. The Crossing Rubber–Lunen FMR, implemented under the Department of Agriculture's Philippine Rural Development Project (PRDP), exemplifies how infrastructure development advances inclusive rural growth: the 4.9-kilometer, forty-one million eight hundred-thousand-peso (₱41.8 million) concrete road now connects agricultural barangays to the town proper, facilitating the efficient movement of commodities such as coconut, banana, coffee, cacao, cassava, and other high-value crops.

According to the Department of the Interior and Local Government

(2024), the project contributed to a ninety-two percent satisfaction rating in governance outcomes among residents, while farmers reported a reduction in product spoilage from as high as forty-five percent to only three percent due to enhanced road accessibility (Escobillo, 2024). Beyond agricultural gains, the project has also improved access to education, healthcare, and other social services, particularly for residents in upland areas. Despite these advances, copra production remains confronted by critical challenges related to market access, transportation, and infrastructure. Farm-to-market roads play a crucial role in addressing these constraints by improving mobility, reducing logistical costs, and supporting the long-term sustainability of coconut farming. Understanding community perspectives on these infrastructural developments is therefore essential for identifying persistent gaps, evaluating the effectiveness of existing interventions, and formulating responsive policies that strengthen agricultural resilience and promote sustainable rural progress.

This study is not only designed to determine community perspectives on farm-to-market problems affecting copra production and the experiences of copra farmers, but also to connect these issues to wider global development priorities, particularly the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

SDG 1 (No Poverty) is relevant because smallholder farmers often experience intergenerational poverty, characterized by low and unstable incomes and entrenched food insecurity; this study seeks to inform measures that can improve their livelihoods by expanding market reach and ensuring fair pricing.

SDG 2 (Zero Hunger) is addressed by examining how sustainable agricultural practices and equitable opportunities for smallholder farmers can increase productivity and income while enhancing food security in farming communities.

SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) highlights the role of smallholder farmers, who, despite being a small unit of the nation, function as a linchpin of economic growth. Addressing long-standing structural problems in this sector can empower farmers, enhance sustainability and productivity, and reduce inequality, as expanded rights, privileges, and job opportunities in agriculture contribute to more robust economic development.

SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure) emphasizes resilient infrastructure and inclusive industrialization; in the context of copra production in Tupi, South Cotabato, this goal is highly relevant because sector efficiency depends on farm-to-market roads, post-harvest facilities, and access to appropriate technologies. Strengthening infrastructure, providing adequate facilities, and establishing local trading centers directly tackle logistical inefficiencies and improve product quality.

SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production) is advanced when farmers increase production through energy-efficient methods and waste reduction without harming the environment. By encouraging energy-efficient practices, proper waste management, and more mindful use of resources, farming becomes safer for both the environment and the communities that depend on it. This study supports such sustainable practices by promoting approaches that are

practical, affordable, and aligned with the long-term well-being of farmers and the land they cultivate.

SDG 13 (Climate Action) focuses on addressing climate change and protecting communities from its impacts; for copra farmers in Tupi, changing weather patterns such as unpredictable rainfall and extreme heat directly affect coconut yields, drying processes, and overall income. By promoting improved infrastructure, sustainable farming practices, and community awareness, this study supports efforts to help farmers adapt to these risks and strengthen climate resilience.

Therefore, this case study seeks to explore and understand the lived experiences, concerns, and insights of the local community regarding farm-to-market challenges that affect copra production in Tupi, South Cotabato. By examining these everyday realities, the study aims to generate evidence that can guide practical and sustainable strategies for improving agricultural systems and market access. In doing so, it supports broader development priorities such as reducing poverty, promoting fair and sustainable production, strengthening rural infrastructure, and building climate resilience, with the ultimate goal of contributing to long-term agricultural and economic development that uplifts coconut farmers, enhances productivity, and ensures that the benefits of a growing coconut industry are widely shared across the community.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to examine the key factors influencing copra production in the Municipality of Tupi, South Cotabato, with particular emphasis on the farm-to-market challenges experienced by local coconut farmers. Specifically, it seeks to identify the major barriers that affect the timely, efficient, and profitable transport of copra and to analyze how these constraints influence farmers' productivity, income stability, and participation in the coconut value chain. The study also aims to assess the availability and effectiveness of existing infrastructure, facilities, and support programs that shape copra production and distribution. Furthermore, it explores community perspectives on how local agricultural conditions align with relevant Sustainable Development Goals, particularly those related to poverty reduction, sustainable production, resilient infrastructure, and climate adaptation. Finally, the research intends to propose practical, evidence-based strategies to mitigate these challenges and support farmers in achieving more stable, equitable, and sustainable livelihoods.

2. Materials and Methods

This study employed a descriptive quantitative research design using a survey method to capture community perceptions regarding farm-to-market challenges in the copra industry. The target population comprised residents of Tupi, South Cotabato, who are directly or indirectly involved in copra production and marketing, including farmers, vendors, traders, cooperative members, transport workers, government employees, and other community members familiar with copra-related activities.

A total of 50 respondents were selected through convenience sampling based on their availability and willingness to participate. Inclusion criteria

required respondents to be at least 18 years old and to have at least one year of familiarity with copra production, marketing, or related support services.

Data were collected through an adapted structured questionnaire developed from existing instruments on agricultural production, farm-to-market infrastructure, marketing and pricing, and support systems. The questionnaire consisted of several parts: (1) respondent profile; (2) production inputs and constraints; (3) farm-to-market infrastructure; (4) marketing and pricing dynamics; (5) support systems; and (6) recommended interventions. Most items were measured using a five-point Likert scale (e.g., from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree” or from “very poor” to “excellent”), allowing the assessment of respondents’ level of agreement or evaluation of specific statements related to copra production and marketing.

To ensure content validity, the instrument was reviewed by three experts in agriculture and rural development, who assessed the clarity, relevance, and cultural appropriateness of the items. Their comments were used to refine the wording and organization of the questionnaire before data collection. A pilot test was then conducted with a small group of respondents from a nearby community not included in the final sample to check the comprehensibility and consistency of the items. Based on the pilot data, internal consistency reliability was computed, and the main multi-item scales yielded a Cronbach’s alpha coefficient above 0.70, indicating acceptable reliability for descriptive research purposes.

The finalized survey was administered personally by the researchers. All respondents were informed about the purpose of the study and the voluntary nature of their participation, and their consent was obtained prior to answering the questionnaire. Respondents were assured that their answers would be treated with strict confidentiality and used solely for academic purposes. Ethical clearance or institutional approval was secured from the researchers’ academic institution, and the study adhered to basic ethical principles of respect, beneficence, and justice.

Data analysis was conducted using descriptive statistics. Frequencies and percentages were computed to summarize the demographic characteristics of the respondents. Weighted means were used to determine the level of agreement or perceived severity/importance of key indicators related to production difficulties, transportation and infrastructure issues, price and market dynamics, cooperative and government support, and proposed interventions. The resulting weighted means were interpreted using pre-defined verbal descriptors (e.g., “moderate,” “moderately high,” “high”) to facilitate the discussion of the findings in relation to the study objectives.

3. Results and Discussion

The respondents are mostly young adults aged 18–25 and college-educated, indicating a youthful, educated community that is potentially open to innovation, cooperative organization, and digital tools for market coordination, alongside an older group with over ten years of copra experience that contributes intergenerational perspectives. They widely agree that unstable

copra prices, high transport costs due to poor roads, and limited drying and storage facilities significantly undermine productivity and income stability, illustrating how market and infrastructural constraints jointly erode small producers' margins.

Farm-to-market roads are strongly valued for enabling faster transport, reducing costs, and decreasing spoilage, with perceived income and market-access gains reflecting the economic benefits of improved logistics. Respondents prioritize infrastructure development, financial assistance, and local buying centers, alongside training and modern facilities, signaling the need for a combined strategy of transport investments, institutional support, and financial services to reduce dependence on middlemen and address structural vulnerabilities in the local copra value chain.

Table 1. Demographic Profile of the Respondents.

Age	Frequency (n=50)	Percentage %
18-25 years old	35	70.00%
26-30 years old	0	0.00%
31-45 years old	9	18.00%
46-50 years old	1	2.00%
51-60 years old	5	10.00%
Highest Educational Attainment	Frequency (n=50)	Percentage %
No Formal Education	4	8.00%
Elementary	2	4.00%
Highschool	10	20.00%
College/Technical	34	68.00%
Occupation/Role	Frequency (n=50)	Percentage %
Farmer	15	30.00%
Vendor	7	14.00%
Trader	4	8.00%
Resident	14	28.00%
Government Employee	1	2.00%
Coop Member	3	6.00%
Transport Worker	1	2.00%
Student	5	10.00%
Years Familiar with Copra Industry	Frequency (n=50)	Percentage %
Less than 1 year	13	26.00%
1-5 years	12	24.00%
6-10 years	4	8.00%
More than 10 years	21	42.00%

Household Size	Frequency (n=50)	Percentage %
2	3	6.00%
3	5	10.00%
4	11	22.00%
5	12	24.00%
6	7	14.00%
7	9	18.00%
8	2	4.00%
10	1	2.00%

Table 1 presents the demographic profile of the respondents in terms of age. Most respondents are young adults aged 18–25 years old, accounting for 70% (n=35) of the total sample, while 18% (n=9) are aged 31–45 years. Smaller proportions fall within the age groups 51–60 (10%), 46–50 (1%), and 26–30 (0%). In terms of gender, most respondents are female, comprising 58% (n=29) of the total, whereas males account for 42% (n=21). With respect to educational attainment, most respondents have completed college or technical education, representing 68% (n=34) of the population. In contrast, 20% (n=10) finished high school, 8% (n=4) reported having no formal education, and 4% (n=2) attained elementary education only. In terms of occupation, the largest group is farmers at 30% (n=15), followed by residents at 28% (n=14), vendors at 14% (n=7), traders at 8% (n=4), cooperative (Coop) members at 2% (n=3), government employees at 2% (n=4), and transport workers at 2% (n=4).

Regarding familiarity with the copra industry, most respondents have been familiar with the industry for more than 10 years, accounting for 42% (n=21) of the total population. Additionally, 26% (n=13) have less than one year of familiarity, while 24% (n=12) have 1–5 years of experience. Furthermore, 2% (n=1) of the respondents are government employees, and another 2% (n=1) are transport workers. In terms of household size, most respondents have five household members, comprising 24% (n=12) of the population. Meanwhile, 22% (n=11) have four members, 18% (n=9) have seven members, and 14% (n=7) have six members. Smaller groups include households with two members at 6% (n=3), eight members at 4% (n=2), and ten members at 2% (n=1). These results indicate that household sizes vary, although many respondents belong to medium-sized families.

Table 2. Key Challenges Affecting Copra Production and Marketing (n = 50)

Challenge	Weighted Mean	Verbal Interpretation
Unstable copra prices affect income.	3.52	Moderately High
High transportation costs and poor roads	3.4	Moderately High
Limited drying and storage facilities	3.32	Moderately High
Lack of access to financial assistance	3.2	Moderate

Weather conditions affect quality and yield	3.12	Moderate
Overall Weighted Mean	3.31	Moderately High

Table 2 highlights that unstable copra prices (weighted mean = 3.52, “Moderately High”), high transportation costs and poor roads (3.40, “Moderately High”), and limited drying and storage facilities (3.32, “Moderately High”) are perceived as the most critical challenges affecting copra production and marketing in Tupi. These results indicate broad agreement among respondents that volatility in farmgate prices, high logistical expenses, and inadequate post-harvest infrastructure substantially undermine productivity and income stability. Such concerns mirror wider evidence from rural commodity chains where smallholders face both market and infrastructural constraints.

By contrast, lack of access to financial assistance (3.20, “Moderate”) and weather conditions affecting quality and yield (3.12, “Moderate”) are viewed as important but comparatively less pressing. This suggests that, while credit and climate-related risks do matter to respondents, day-to-day economic pressures linked to prices, transport costs, and facilities are more immediately felt. The overall weighted mean of 3.31, interpreted as “Moderately High,” reflects a strong consensus that these combined factors hinder efficient production and marketing. Taken together, the findings emphasize that addressing price instability, reducing transport and road-related costs, and investing in drying and storage facilities are central to improving the viability of the local copra industry.

Table 3. Perceived Benefits of Farm-to- Market Roads (n = 50)

Perceived Benefits	Weighted Mean	Verbal Interpretation
Easier and faster transport of copra products	3.72	High
Reduced transportation cost	3.64	High
Decreased spoilage and product loss	3.6	High
Improved access to markets and buyers	3.56	High
Increased income due to better market access	3.48	Moderately High
Overall Weighted Mean	3.6	High

Table 3 shows consistently high ratings for the perceived benefits of farm-to-market roads. Respondents agreed that easier and faster transport (weighted mean = 3.72, “High”), reduced transportation cost (3.64, “High”), and decreased spoilage and product loss (3.60, “High”) are key advantages of improved road infrastructure. These results indicate a clear recognition that better roads directly lower logistical burdens and protect product quality, which in turn supports more reliable deliveries to buyers and processing centers.

Improved access to markets and buyers (3.56, “High”) and increased income due to better market access (3.48, “Moderately High”) are also positively perceived, though slightly lower, suggesting that respondents see financial gains as closely linked to, but somewhat conditional on, broader market conditions and pricing structures. The overall weighted mean of 3.60, rated as “High,” reflects strong appreciation of farm-to-market roads as a foundational intervention for

enhancing efficiency, competitiveness, and resilience in the copra value chain. These perceptions align with empirical studies showing that rural road investments can expand market participation, reduce marketing margins, and improve household welfare.

Table 4. Respondents' Perceptions on Copra

Perceived Benefits	Weighted Mean	Verbal Interpretation
Improvement of farm-to-market roads	3.68	High
Provision of financial assistance or subsidies	3.6	High
Establishment of local buying centers	3.52	Moderately High
Conduct of training and seminars for farmers	3.44	Moderately High
Access to modern drying and processing facilities	3.36	Moderately High
Overall Weighted Mean	3.52	Moderately High

Table 4 presents respondents' views on potential interventions to strengthen the copra industry. Improvement of farm-to-market roads (weighted mean = 3.68, "High") and provision of financial assistance or subsidies (3.60, "High") emerge as top priorities, underscoring the perceived need to combine physical infrastructure with financial support to alleviate high costs and income volatility. The establishment of local buying centers (3.52, "Moderately High") is also strongly favored, reflecting a desire to create more accessible and transparent marketing channels closer to producers. Training and seminars for farmers (3.44, "Moderately High") and access to modern drying and processing facilities (3.36, "Moderately High") receive slightly lower but still positive ratings, indicating recognition that capacity-building and technological improvements are important complements to roads and finance. The overall weighted mean of 3.52, interpreted as "Moderately High," signals broad consensus on the need for a package of interventions that integrates infrastructure development, financial assistance, market organization, and skills enhancement. These preferences point toward an integrated policy agenda designed to reduce dependence on middlemen, improve price transparency, and strengthen the sustainability of the copra value chain in Tupi.

Table 5. Respondents' Recommendations for Copra Industry Improvement.

Key Areas	Major Findings	Implication
Demographic Profile	The majority of respondents are female (70%), aged 18–25 (65%), and college graduates (80%).	The copra industry is supported by a young, educated, and active workforce.

Challenges Encountered	Respondents identified unstable prices (75%), high transport costs (70%), and limited facilities (65%) as major concerns.	Economic instability and inadequate infrastructure hinder productivity and income generation.
Perceived Benefits of Farm-to-Market Roads	Improved transportation (85%), reduced transportation costs (80%), and decreased product spoilage (77.5%).	Infrastructure development directly enhances operational efficiency and market access.
Suggested Interventions and provide financial aid	Improve roads (82.5%), provide financial assistance (80%), and establish buying centers (75%).	Government support and organized interventions are essential for industry sustainability.

Table 5 synthesizes the key findings and their implications across demographic characteristics, challenges, benefits, and suggested interventions. The demographic profile indicates that the copra industry is supported by a young, educated, and active workforce (e.g., majority female, aged 18–25, and college graduates), suggesting strong human capital for adopting improved practices, engaging in cooperative activities, and responding to market opportunities. At the same time, respondents emphasize major challenges such as unstable prices (75%), high transport costs (70%), and limited facilities (65%), which collectively contribute to economic instability and constrain productivity and income.

Perceived benefits of farm-to-market roads such as improved transport (85%), reduced costs (80%), and reduced spoilage (77.5%), reinforce the earlier finding that infrastructure development directly enhances efficiency and market access. Suggested interventions, including improving roads (82.5%), providing financial aid (80%), and establishing buying centers (75%), highlight the central role of government support and organized programs in promoting sector sustainability. Overall, the weighted mean of 3.50 indicates a “Moderately High” level of agreement, underscoring that targeted investments in infrastructure, financial support, and cooperative organization are viewed as essential strategies for sustaining and upgrading the copra industry in Tupi.

4. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that copra production and marketing in Tupi, South Cotabato, are sustained by a relatively young and educated community that nonetheless faces persistent structural constraints. Unstable copra prices, high transportation costs linked to inadequate farm-to-market roads, and limited post-harvest facilities emerged as the most salient challenges, collectively undermining income stability and production efficiency. At the same time, respondents strongly recognized the benefits of improved road infrastructure and targeted support measures, including financial assistance, local buying centers, and strengthened cooperative arrangements, as critical pathways for enhancing market access and reducing losses. By highlighting community perspectives on these interrelated constraints and interventions, the study contributes locally grounded evidence that can inform municipal and provincial planning, guide investments in rural infrastructure and support services, and ultimately promote more equitable and sustainable outcomes in the copra value chain.

5. Recommendations

Prioritize the construction, upgrading, and regular maintenance of farm-to-market roads in copra-producing barangays to reduce transportation costs, minimize spoilage, and facilitate timely access to markets and processing centers. Invest in post-harvest and processing facilities, such as drying sheds, storage warehouses, and small-scale processing units, to preserve product quality, reduce weather-related risks, and enable value-adding activities. Support the formation and strengthening of farmers' cooperatives and producer organizations to enhance bargaining power, coordinate collective marketing, and negotiate more favorable prices for copra producers. Expand access to financial and technical assistance through low-interest credit schemes, capital support, and training on improved production, quality control, and marketing practices tailored to the copra sector. Develop and institutionalize mechanisms for price transparency, including regular dissemination of farmgate and wholesale prices through local government channels and digital platforms, to reduce information asymmetries and dependence on middlemen. Promote multi-stakeholder partnerships among local government units, national agencies, private firms, and civil society organizations to coordinate investments and programs across the copra value chain and generate local employment opportunities.

6. Limitations of the Study

This study is subject to several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. Firstly, the research focused exclusively on a selected adult population in Doha, Qatar, excluding younger individuals and pregnant women. As a result, the generalizability of the findings to these specific groups is limited. A primary constraint is the small sample size ($n = 60$), which limits the statistical power of the study. Furthermore, the cross-sectional design of the study only captures a single point in time, meaning that a causal relationship between lifestyle factors and sleep apnea risk cannot be inferred. Secondly, while standardized instruments such as the Pittsburgh Sleep Quality Index (PSQI) and the STOP-Bang Questionnaire were employed; these tools were adapted for the study and relied primarily on self-reported data. This adaptation, including the Likert-scale conversion, may have influenced the original construct validity of the instruments and requires further psychometric validation in the local context. The inherent subjectivity of self-reporting might have introduced recall bias or social desirability bias, potentially affecting the reliability and accuracy of the data on sleep quality and lifestyle behaviors.

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- Cite as:** Misel, A., Corporal, L. G., Lanugan, C. J., & Pelmin, M. (2026). Community Perspectives on Farm-to-Market Challenges Affecting Copra Production in Tupi, South Cotabato, Philippines: A Descriptive Survey Study. *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies in Higher Education*, 3(3), 77–88. <https://doi.org/10.70847/739988>