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MORALITY BEFORE KNOWLEDGE

Roots of resilience: Coping, identity, and innovation among farmers

Ma Lecarme S. Susada[1,*]
[1] *Department of Hospitality and Tourism, University of San Carlos, Cebu City, Cebu, Philippines.*
*Correspondence: mssusada@usc.edu.ph

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ABSTRACT

Background: Farmers in Misamis Occidental face multiple challenges, including physical labor exhaustion, financial instability, climate unpredictability, and lack of institutional support. This study explores the lived experiences and adaptive strategies of these farmers to understand the essence of resilience within a rural Philippine context. **Methods:** Drawing on thematic analysis of in-depth interviews, the research identified key sources of resilience such as spiritual strength, familial responsibility, resourcefulness, and deep-rooted farming identity. **Findings:** Participants described farming not only as labor but as a purposeful sacrifice for future generations, shaped by cultural upbringing and personal meaning. Despite enduring hardship, farmers maintained a strong sense of perseverance through prayer, peaceful conflict resolution, and emotional endurance. **Conclusion:** The results suggest that resilience among farmers is shaped by an interplay of socio-emotional, spiritual, and contextual factors, highlighting the importance of culturally grounded support mechanisms. **Novelty/Originality of this article:** This study contributes original insights by contextualizing resilience within the spiritual and socio-cultural realities of rural farmers in the Philippines, offering a novel foundation for developing localized resilience-building interventions and policy frameworks.

KEYWORDS: resilience; rural farmers; adaptive strategies.

1. Introduction

Agriculture continues to be a cornerstone of global food security and rural livelihoods, employing nearly 27% of the world's working population and contributing significantly to gross domestic product (GDP) in low- and middle-income countries (Özekan & Akan, 2023). Despite its importance, the sector faces growing threats from climate change, resource depletion, market volatility, and institutional constraints (di Santo et al., 2022). Globally, up to 80% of the poor live in rural areas and depend on agriculture for survival, making resilience in farming systems a critical policy and research priority (Saleem et al., 2024).

In Southeast Asia, agriculture remains vital to socio-economic development. The sector employs about 35% of the ASEAN labor force and contributes 8.6% of regional GDP (Zhang et al., 2023). However, the region has experienced intensified climate-related disasters floods, droughts, and typhoons that have affected over 40 million people in the last 20 years, threatening the sustainability of rural livelihoods and food systems (United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, 2020). Smallholder farmers, who dominate production in the region, often lack access to capital, training, and social safety nets, making them particularly vulnerable to systemic shocks. In the Philippines, agriculture employs 22.5% of the workforce and contributes 8.9% to the GDP as of 2023 (Interagency Agricultural Projections Committee, 2023). In Misamis Occidental province in Northern Mindanao, agriculture is the

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backbone of the local economy, with over 61% of the land area used for farming activities, primarily rice, corn, banana, and coconut production (Sarmiento, 2024; Taer & Taer, 2024). Yet, farmers in the region face a range of adversities including weather extremes, pest outbreaks, financial insecurity, and a lack of recognition. These challenges demand not only technical adaptation but also psychological strength, commonly referred to as resilience.

Studies by Panpakdee & Khanbut (2025) and Sanusi & Dries (2025) introduced the concept of resilience in Farming, emphasizing the capacity to absorb shocks and adapt to stressors. Within rural contexts, resilience is often examined through structural factors such as access to capital, information, and technology. However, limited research explores the subjective, lived experiences of resilience from the standpoint of farmers themselves particularly in the Philippine context, where sociocultural values like faith, endurance, and interdependence are deeply embedded. Recent literature highlights the importance of farmer agency and adaptive capacity. For instance, Troy et al. (2023) emphasized that resilience is shaped not only by external conditions but also by internal mechanisms emotions, meanings, and social relationships. Similarly, Adefila et al. (2024) argued that resilience in rural communities is underpinned by relational strengths, such as identity, culture, and local knowledge. These findings support the necessity for qualitative approaches that explore resilience not merely as a technical concept but as a personal and community-based phenomenon.

Despite growing international literature, research remains limited on how Filipino farmers, particularly in rural and high-risk areas, construct and express their resilience. Existing studies often overlook psychological and socio-cultural dimensions such as spirituality, farming identity (Chan & Enticott, 2023), or intergenerational motivationselements that are deeply embedded in Filipino agricultural communities (Latoza & San, 2025). Furthermore, resilience assessments often rely on quantitative scales, failing to capture the depth and complexity of lived experiences. This study addresses that gap by exploring the lived experience of farmers in Misamis Occidental using a qualitative approach. Grounded in the Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (Riopel, 2019) and supported by resilience theory, the study seeks to understand the meanings, motivations, and mechanisms that enable farmers to persist in their livelihoods. The main objective is to uncover the internal and external resources that shape farmers' resilience, and how these translate into sustained behavior. The study operates on the assumption that farmers with strong spiritual grounding, familial support, and adaptive behaviors are more likely to exhibit resilience in the face of adversity.

2. Methods

2.1 Design

This study utilized a qualitative research design rooted in the constructivist-interpretivist paradigm, which posits that knowledge is co-constructed through interaction and shaped by social, cultural, and contextual factors. This philosophical foundation allowed the researcher to explore the lived experiences and subjective meanings of resilience as perceived by rural farmers. The qualitative approach was deemed suitable for eliciting in-depth narratives and capturing the emotional, cultural, and situational dimensions of farmers' responses to adversity.

2.2 Research location

The study was conducted in Misamis Occidental, a province in Region X (Northern Mindanao), Philippines, selected for its high dependence on agriculture, recurring exposure to climate-induced and economic stressors, and the documented vulnerability of its rural population. According to the Philippine Statistics Authority (2024), the province has a population of 617,333, with over 60% residing in rural areas and approximately 118,933 hectaresor 61.33% of the total land area allocated to farming, particularly rice, corn, banana,

and coconut cultivation. Despite this agricultural base, the region reports a poverty incidence of 29.1%, rendering it highly susceptible to livelihood disruption and food insecurity. Furthermore, the Department of Science and Technology in 2022 classifies the province as highly vulnerable to extreme climate events such as droughts, floods, and typhoons associated with El Niño and La Niña patterns. These risks, coupled with limited access to credit, crop insurance, and agricultural extension services, justify the location as an appropriate and under-researched site for resilience-focused inquiry. The fieldwork was conducted from January to March 2025 to coincide with the cropping cycle and capture narratives during periods of peak agricultural labor and environmental stress.

2.3 Participants and sampling

A purposive sampling strategy was employed to identify 42 rural farmers in Misamis Occidental who satisfied the following inclusion criteria: active engagement in farming within the province, a minimum of five years of farming experience, and a willingness to participate in an in-depth interview. Participants were selected to ensure variation across age, gender, and type of farming practiced, thereby enhancing the richness and representativeness of the qualitative data.

Table 1. Socioeconomic, agricultural, and community support characteristics of respondents (N = 42)

Gender	f	%	Age	f	%	Income per month	f	%
Female	21	50	18 - 31	13	30.95	2,000 - 5,000	34	80.95
Male	18	42.86	32 - 44	11	26.19	5,000 - 7,000	6	14.29
No response	3	7.14	45 - 57	8	19.05	7,000 - 9,000	1	2.38
			58 - 70	5	11.90	No response	1	2.38
			71 - 83	2	4.76			
			84 - 96	1	2.38			
			No response	2	4.76			
Occupation	f	%	Highest educational attainment	f	%	No. of years of service	f	%
Husband	42	100	Highschool	21	50	1-5	15	35.71
Farmer	28	66.67	Elementary	12	28.57	30-35	8	19.05
Fisherman	4	9.52	College	5	11.90	5-10	7	16.67
Owns a grocery store	1	2.38	No responses	3	2.38	40-50	4	9.52
Others	2	4.76	Post graduate	1	7.14	No responses	3	7.14
No response	7	16.67				10-15	2	4.76
Wife	42	100				15-20	1	2.38
Attending the children	15	35.71				25-30	1	2.38
Farming	1	2.38				35-40	1	2.38
Others	2	4.76						
Produce of the land	f	%	Activities	f	%	Trainings taken	f	%
Cereal crops	28	66.67	Raising chickens	9	21.43	Livestock Farming	20	47.62
Root crops	9	21.43	Raising hogs/pigs	8	19.05	Cooking	13	30.95
Medicinal herbs	3	7.14	Sewing	7	16.67	Farm safety	4	9.52
Legumes	1	2.38	No responses	7	16.67	Organic farming	3	7.14
Spices	1	2.38	Bakery	5	11.90	Crop management	2	4.76
			Food vendor	3	7.14			

			Supplier of crops, vegetables, fruits, & livestock	2	4.76			
			Fruit vendor	1	2.38			
Natural calamity experienced	f	%	Crop production strategies and adaptation	f	%	Agricultural setback coping strategies	f	%
Thunderstorm	18	42.86	Crop rotation & Diversification	23	54.76	Financial aid	34	80.95
No responses	12	28.57	No responses	14	33.33	Improved irrigation	7	16.67
Typhoon	10	23.80	No responses	2	4.76	Soil Conservation	1	2.38
Flood	1	2.38	Relocating farm	2	4.76			
Drought	1	2.38	Others	1	2.38			
Financial management	f	%	Financial support system	f	%	Sustainable agricultural practices	f	%
Side-line jobs	24	57.14	None	15	35.71	Clear large Areas for forest farming	17	40.47
No response	7	16.67	Barangay's agricultural support subsidy	14	33.33	Organic Farming practices	14	33.33
Increasing debt	4	9.52	Crop insurance programs	9	21.43	Restoring natural resources	7	16.67
Depending on government subsidies	3	7.14	No response	4	9.52	Use of chemical fertilizers	3	7.14
Crop insurance	3	7.14				No response	1	2.38
Ignoring market fluctuations	1	2.38						
Innovative farming techniques	f	%	Local / Barangay support	f	%	Community support	f	%
Pesticide use	19	45.24	Helping farmers by helping them supplying with materials need for farming	25	59.52	The community holding various of activities/programs for farmers	25	59.52
None	10	23.81	Sharing agricultural knowledge and techniques	12	28.57	Farmers' cooperative for bulk purchasing and marketing	14	33.33
Irrigation	7	16.67	Helding a local produce sale to	4	9.52	Competition among farmers	2	4.76

			help the farmers			leading to division		
Permaculture and agroforestry	3	7.14	No response	1	2.38	No response	1	2.38
Monoculture farming	2	4.76						
No response	1	2.38						
Role of technology	f	%	Policies / government initiatives	f	%			
Makes my job more efficient & easier	22	52.38	Ayuda	32	76.19			
Aiding in my livelihood	17	40.48	Financial Ayuda	7	16.67			
No access to technology	1	2.38	No response	2	4.76			
Avoiding technology	1	2.38	Heavy taxation	1	2.38			
No response	1	2.38						

The study involved 42 participants selected through purposive sampling, all of whom were rural farmers residing in various municipalities of Misamis Occidental, Philippines. Participants represented a diverse demographic and socio-economic cross-section. The majority were female (50%), with males comprising 42.86%, reflecting the active involvement of both genders in subsistence farming. Age distribution ranged from 18 to 96 years, with a concentration in the younger cohort (30.95% aged 18–31), indicating intergenerational engagement in agriculture. Educational backgrounds were generally low, with 50% having completed high school, 28.57% elementary, and only 11.9% attaining college education or higher, revealing limited access to formal training. Economically, most participants lived under constrained conditions, with 80.95% reporting a monthly income between PHP 2,000 and PHP 5,000, underscoring the vulnerability of the farming population. Farming experience varied, with 35.71% having less than five years of service and others exceeding three decades, offering a mix of traditional and emerging perspectives. Participants were primarily engaged in cereal crop production (66.67%) and had experienced multiple climate-related disruptions such as thunderstorms and typhoons.

2.4 Data collection techniques

Data were collected using semi-structured, in-depth interviews, which allowed for both flexibility and structure in eliciting rich, nuanced narratives from participants. This qualitative approach was selected to enable participants to express their experiences in their own words and to ensure that emergent themes could be explored with depth and contextual relevance. Interviews were conducted in Cebuano-Bisaya, the native language of the participants, to enhance their comfort, encourage openness, and ensure linguistic and cultural authenticity in their responses. The use of the local language also minimized misinterpretation and allowed participants to fully articulate the complexities of their lived experiences without language barriers, which is particularly crucial in culturally grounded and emotion-laden topics such as rural resilience and hardship.

Each interview lasted between 45 and 90 minutes, depending on the participant's availability, comfort, and willingness to elaborate on the questions posed. To reduce potential power imbalances and to foster trust, interviews were conducted in familiar and non-threatening environments which is the participants' farms where they felt most at ease. This setting facilitated a more natural conversational flow and enabled the researcher to observe relevant environmental and contextual cues, adding depth to the data interpretation process. An interview guide was developed based on existing literature and

the study's research objectives. It included open-ended questions that explored several key domains: participants' day-to-day experiences in farming, the emotional and physical toll of their labor, their perceptions of and responses to adverse conditions, their coping mechanisms and support systems, and their personal interpretations of resilience and endurance. Probing questions were used as needed to explore specific insights or to clarify ambiguous responses, ensuring a balance between guided inquiry and participant-led storytelling. All interviews were audio-recorded with the informed consent of participants to ensure accuracy and transparency in data collection. The recordings were then transcribed verbatim, preserving verbal expressions, pauses, and emotional cues as much as possible to maintain the integrity of the participants' narratives. These transcripts served as the primary data for thematic analysis. The entire data collection process was designed to honor the voices of the participants and to produce a rich, culturally grounded understanding of rural farming resilience in the context of Misamis Occidental.

2.5 Ethical considerations

The researcher ensured that all procedures conducted in the study strictly followed established ethical standards in qualitative research. Prior to participation, respondents were provided with comprehensive information regarding the study's objectives, procedures, and their role in the research. The voluntary nature of their involvement was clearly emphasized, assuring participants that they could refuse to answer any question or withdraw from the study at any time without facing any form of penalty or negative consequence. Informed consent was obtained verbally and/or in writing, depending on participant preference and contextual appropriateness. The researcher emphasized that all data collected would be treated with the highest level of confidentiality. Coded identifiers were used instead of personal names during transcription, data analysis, and reporting, in order to maintain anonymity and protect participant identities. The researcher also took deliberate steps to ensure that sensitive narratives were handled with cultural sensitivity and emotional care, especially when dealing with topics involving livelihood hardship, personal resilience, or emotional distress.

Furthermore, participants were assured that their responses would be used solely for academic purposes and that no personal information would be disclosed to third parties. The entire research process was guided by the principles of respect for persons, beneficence, and justice. These measures were intended to foster a safe and respectful environment, thereby upholding the dignity and autonomy of all individuals involved in the study.

2.6 Data analysis procedure

Thematic analysis was applied following Braun & Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework: familiarization with the data through repeated reading; generation of initial codes; identification of candidate themes; review and refinement of themes for consistency and clarity; definition and naming of final themes; and construction of a coherent narrative integrating thematic insights and direct quotations. Rigor was enhanced through member checking with five participants to validate the interpretations and through triangulation of interview data with field notes and contextual observations. A matrix-based coding system was utilized to facilitate thematic comparison across cases, ensuring analytic depth and traceability.

3. Results and Discussion

Based on the treated data, emerging themes are presented below:

3.1 Theme 1: Physical exhaustion & intensive labour – Defining the labor of farming

Participants emphasized the relentless physical labor associated with farming. Tasks such as spraying, planting, and harvesting are physically demanding, leading to fatigue and bodily pain.

> *"Akong kasinataian isip ka mag-uuma kay ang kahago hilabi na og mag spray og sagbot laayog makotan og tubig para lang maka spray og patay sa sagbot"* (T1).
> My experience as a farmer is the hardship, especially when spraying weedsit's tiring and I get soaked just to kill the weeds.

> *"Mag-abot ang sakit sa hawak ug kasakit sa kaluwasan ang akong mabati"* (T1).
> I feel back pain and hip pain all at once.

> *"Pero mo abot jud sa time nga kapoyon ko"* (T2).
> There really comes a time when I get very tired.

> *"Isip usa ka mag-uumaa naka-sinati ko og kaloya"* (T3).
> As a farmer, I have experienced weakness.

Such consistent accounts demonstrate the daily physical toll endured by farmers. Despite this, many remain committed for the benefit of future generations:

> *"Kapoy gyud sya sa, pero dako kaayog katabang labi na sa umaabot nga next henerasyon"* (T2).
> It's truly tiring, but it greatly helps, especially for the next generation.

This theme underscores the intense physical demands of farming, with participants describing chronic fatigue and bodily pain from labor-intensive tasks such as spraying, planting, and harvesting often without protective equipment. These findings align with prior literature on the embodied toll of low-mechanized agriculture (Singh & Singh, 2023). In Misamis Occidental, where manual farming persists amid climate variability and limited access to labor-saving tools, such strain is exacerbated. Participants' accounts of pain are not isolated complaints but point to occupational health risks overlooked in rural policy. This burden is particularly acute among women who balance farm work with caregiving. Despite hardship, many farmers framed their labor as a sacrifice for future generations, reflecting a resilience ethos rooted in familial obligation and moral economy (Vunibola et al., 2024). These insights suggest the need for wellness-centered interventions such as ergonomic training and mechanization support to preserve both the productivity and dignity of rural livelihoods.

3.2 Theme 2: Financial struggles – Insecurity and income challenges

The farmers expressed significant financial burdens, especially regarding the high costs of farm inputs like fertilizers and labor:

> *"Ang akong mga kakuli-an asa a farmer, sa panahon nga ting-nanom... pangapkag og kwarta para makapalit lang og mga abono tas suhol sa pag-daro"* (T2).
> My challenges as a farmer include finding money to buy fertilizer and pay for plowing.

"Kining mabalaw og budget samot nag-maomao rang kwarta kay sa panahon karon mahal na kaayong palitonon" (T10).
Budgeting is hard, especially now that goods are very expensive.

"Masinati nato permi ang kakapoy og kagutom…" (T6).
We often experience fatigue and hunger…

Farmers in Misamis Occidental reported persistent financial strain, citing difficulties in affording basic farm inputs such as fertilizers and labor. This economic insecurity is compounded by rising prices of commodities, making daily budgeting increasingly difficult. Consistent with Onsay & Rabajante (2024), these findings reflect the structural poverty faced by rural households in the Philippines, where inflation and market volatility hinder sustainable production. The narratives reveal not only financial insufficiency but also its physiological toll manifesting as fatigue and hunger. Such economic precarity constrains adaptive capacity, forcing farmers to rely on debt, government aid, or off-farm side jobs. These patterns indicate a survival-oriented livelihood system where innovation and growth are secondary to basic subsistence. Addressing rural resilience thus requires not only technological interventions but also financial mechanisms such as input subsidies, credit access, and crop insurance to buffer against economic shocks.

3.3 Theme 3: Weather and environmental challenges – External challenges

Environmental unpredictability was cited as a major barrier:

"Ang akong mga kakuli-an as a farmer kay ulan o init, trabaho, para lang naay mapana pian" (T5).
Rain or heat, we work just to have something to harvest.

"Ting-ulan... motobo ang mga klasi-klasing mga sagbot nga motabon sa mga pananom" (T9).
During rainy season, different types of weeds grow and cover the crops.

Farmers identified unpredictable weather patterns particularly extreme heat and heavy rains as persistent threats to crop productivity. These climatic stressors contribute to weed overgrowth, crop damage, and labor inefficiencies. In Misamis Occidental, classified as climate-vulnerable by the Department of Science and Technology – Philippines (2022), such environmental disruptions severely affect smallholder farmers who lack access to resilient infrastructure and weather-adaptive technologies. These accounts align with Parreño (2023), who note that Philippine agriculture is highly susceptible to seasonal variability, impacting planting schedules and yields. The dependence on manual methods intensifies the effects of weather extremes, underscoring the urgent need for climate-resilient farming systems, weed control support, and localized weather forecasting tools to enhance preparedness and sustainability.

3.4 Theme 4: Animal intrusion – Other external agricultural challenges

Uncontrolled animals and pests hinder crop growth:

"Kung magtanom kami adonay mga hayopan nga modangan sa among tanom" (T3).
When we plant, animals intrude and destroy our crops.

"Naay daghan hayopan sa duol... usahay dili nila malikayan ang pagtigway" (T8).
There are many animals nearby and they sometimes can't help but eat the crops.

Participants described frequent crop damage caused by stray or freely roaming animals, highlighting a persistent yet often overlooked agricultural challenge. In Misamis Occidental, where farms are typically unfenced and boundaries are shared among neighbors, animal intrusion disrupts planting efforts and reduces yields, further straining already limited resources. This challenge illustrates the need for community-based farm protection strategies and stronger local ordinances on animal control. As noted by Akanmu et al. (2023), unmanaged agro-ecological interactions such as animal intrusions can significantly undermine smallholder resilience and productivity. Addressing this issue requires both infrastructural support (e.g., fencing subsidies) and social negotiation mechanisms to manage shared land use effectively.

3.5 Theme 5: Lack of recognition – Emotional impact of disregard

Some farmers noted how their work is disregarded by the community:

"Usahay mananom mi adonay mga tawo nga wala galantaw sa kahago namo" (T7).
Sometimes we plant and people disregard our hard work.

"Makawala bitaw ug gana" (T7).
It really discourages us.

"Unsa may meaning... unta taga-an og saktong bili ang mga mag-uuma" (T1).
The meaning of my experience: farmers should be given proper value.

This theme captures the psychosocial toll of undervaluation, with farmers expressing feelings of discouragement and diminished motivation due to the perceived lack of recognition for their labor. In the rural context of Misamis Occidental, where farming remains the primary livelihood, the absence of social and institutional appreciation reinforces marginalization and weakens morale. The emotional impact of this disregard aligns with existing literature on agrarian identity and dignity, suggesting that resilience is not solely material but also tied to acknowledgment and respect (Talwar et al., 2023). Recognizing farmers' contributions in public discourse and policy is essential to fostering psychological resilience and validating their societal role.

3.6 Theme 6: Spiritual strength and faith – Coping and perseverance

Faith was consistently cited as a primary coping mechanism:

"Pag-ampo sa Ginoo nga unta kini akong gibuhat... mag malampuson" (T1).
I prayed to the Lord that my efforts would succeed.

"Pagsampit sa Ginoo nga tagaan ko niyag maayo nga panglawas" (T6).
I prayed to God for good health.

This theme highlights spirituality as a core coping mechanism among rural farmers in Misamis Occidental. Participants consistently attributed their endurance to faith in divine support, particularly in times of hardship, aligning with Bungay et al. (2023), who noted the centrality of religiosity in Filipino coping strategies. Spiritual belief functions not only as psychological relief but as a culturally embedded framework for resilience (Captari et al., 2023), allowing farmers to contextualize adversity within a higher moral and existential purpose. This faith-based resilience supports emotional stability, especially in environments marked by uncertainty and hardship.

3.7 Theme 7: Peaceful resolution through communication – Addressing conflict with respect

Instead of conflict, many use peaceful communication:

"Pagpahibalo sa tagtungod sa hayopan nga pahiktan kini og hiposan" (T3).
We inform the owners to tie up or keep their animals.

Farmers in Misamis Occidental emphasized non-confrontational, respectful communication as a key strategy in resolving disputes, particularly those related to animal intrusion. Rather than resorting to conflict, participants preferred dialogue and community engagement, reflecting strong relational values embedded in rural Filipino culture. This aligns with resilience literature (Shams et al., 2024; Silveira et al., 2022), which underscores that social cohesion and interpersonal negotiation are critical components of adaptive capacity. Such relational approaches not only preserve community harmony but also enhance the collective ability to manage shared agricultural challenges.

3.8 Theme 8: Resourcefulness – Adapting to constraints

Even without resources, farmers find ways to continue:

"*Wala man gali kwarta pang palit spray, kambruton nalang namo kuni og lampasan"* (T7).
If we don't have money for spray, we just pull the weeds by hand.

This theme highlights the adaptive ingenuity of farmers in Misamis Occidental who, despite financial limitations, continue farming through improvised methods. Participants described substituting costly inputs like herbicides with manual weeding, reflecting a form of grassroots resilience. Such resourcefulness, though driven by necessity, aligns with the concept of "coping innovation" (Rahindra & Wisnujati, 2024), where constrained environments foster creative survival strategies. It also illustrates how rural resilience is not always technologically driven but often rooted in lived experience and practical improvisation.

3.9 Theme 9: Farming as a meaningful sacrifice for future generations – Purpose

Farming is viewed as a sacrifice for the next generation:

"Dili lang sa amoa kundi sa mga umaabot pa nga sunod henerasyon" (T9).
Not just for us, but also for future generations.

This theme reflects how farmers in Misamis Occidental frame their labor as an enduring sacrifice for the benefit of future generations. Farming is not solely a livelihood but a moral and intergenerational commitment, often expressed through narratives of legacy and obligation. Such framing supports Whatt's (2024) notion of the "moral economy," where agricultural labor is imbued with familial and cultural significance. This orientation reinforces resilience not through economic gain but through a sense of purpose rooted in continuity and generational stewardship.

3.10 Theme 10: Farming as a way of life and upbringing – Identity

Many consider farming part of who they are:
"Kapoy sa mag-uma pero agwantahon nalang kay diri mi nanagko sa pag-uuma" (T3).
Farming is tiring, but we endure because we grew up doing it.

This theme reveals that farming in Misamis Occidental is deeply ingrained in the personal and cultural identity of many rural residents. For numerous participants, farming is not simply a livelihood but a way of life instilled through generational practice and early life experiences. Farmers shared that despite the physical toll and economic hardship, they continue to farm because they grew up doing so farming is part of who they are.

This sense of identity-based resilience underscores the intergenerational transmission of agricultural values, where perseverance, hard work, and attachment to the land are normalized and valorized. It reflects what Mubangizi (2024) describe as "place-based resilience," where cultural familiarity and symbolic meaning sustain livelihoods amid adversity. Rather than being driven solely by economic incentives, these farmers exhibit a form of enduring commitment shaped by familial duty, community belonging, and moral purpose. Such identity-driven motivation helps explain the persistence of traditional farming practices even in the face of modernization pressures or better-paying alternatives. It also suggests that future rural development strategies in Misamis Occidental should respect and build upon this cultural foundation rather than attempt to replace it.

3.11 Theme 11: Endurance and practical value of farming experience – Resilience in farming

Farmers compare themselves to resilient tools and animals:

"Ako usa ka butang... sarol... andam mo moboak maski unsa ka gahi ang yuta" (T2).
I'm like a hoe, ready to break through hard soil.

"Ako kay kahoy... survivors... come back stronger" (T4).
I'm like a treestrong and steadfast, always reaching upward.

"Kabayo... agwantahon ang tanan para sa pamilya" (T7).
Like a horse, I endure everything for my family.

This theme captures the farmers' metaphorical expressions of resilience, drawing parallels between themselves and enduring tools or animals that withstand tough conditions. Participants likened themselves to a hoe breaking through hard soil, a tree that survives and grows stronger, or a horse that tirelessly serves its family powerful imagery that reflects their deep-rooted tenacity and sense of purpose. These metaphors illustrate a self-concept grounded in durability, strength, and utility. Such framing reflects how farmers in Misamis Occidental cope with adversity not only through practical adaptations but also through psychological resilience and identity affirmation. Their endurance is not passive but an active stance of persistence against physical, environmental, and economic challenges. The findings resonate with Laura (2024), who argue that resilience is both material and symbolic shaped by one's capacity to find meaning and strength in difficult labor. In a context where support systems are often limited, these symbolic narratives serve as internal motivators, helping farmers continue their work not just for survival, but for legacy, pride, and family sustenance.

3.12 Discussions

This study offers an in-depth, context-rich exploration of the lived experiences, adaptive strategies, and psychosocial resilience of rural farmers in Misamis Occidental, Philippines. Through thematic analysis, eleven interrelated themes emerged, offering a holistic view of how farmers construct resilience within intersecting structural and environmental constraints. The dominant theme, "Physical exhaustion and intensive labour," reflects the enduring corporeal toll of agricultural work, exacerbated in a setting where mechanization is minimal and manual farming practices dominate. In Misamis Occidental, where 61.33% of land is devoted to farming (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2024), such physically intensive labor remains the norm. These findings echo Lobley and

Winter's (2009), as cited in Singh & Singh (2023) observation that the bodily burden of rural labor is often overlooked in policy frameworks. This fatigue is gendered in nature, as 50% of participants were women, underscoring their dual burden of agricultural and caregiving labor (Adefila et al., 2024).

"Financial struggles" emerged as a central theme, shaped by the province's high poverty incidence (29.1%) and limited access to credit, subsidies, and crop insurance (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2024; Onsay & Rabajante, 2024). These findings align with Balisacan and Fuwa's framework Sarmiento (2024) that attributes persistent rural poverty to input inflation, market unpredictability, and policy inattention. Over 80% of participants earned only PHP 2,000–5,000 monthly, reinforcing dependency on informal side-line work and conditional government assistance as essential coping mechanisms. The theme "Weather and environmental challenges" illustrates Misamis Occidental's exposure to climate extremes. The Department of Science and Technology (2022), as cited in Saleem et al. (2024) has classified the province as highly vulnerable to El Niño- and La Niña-induced events. Participants' accounts of erratic rainfall and weed proliferation are consistent with the findings of Lasco et al. (2016), as cited in Özekan & Akan (2023), who emphasize that climate sensitivity remains a key stressor among smallholder farmers across Southeast Asia (Zhang et al., 2023).

Themes such as "Animal intrusion" and "Lack of recognition" introduce social and emotional layers to resilience. In rural Misamis Occidental, communal boundaries and free-grazing practices often result in livestock damaging crops an issue insufficiently addressed by agricultural extension programs (Laura, 2024). Moreover, the emotional toll of being undervalued by one's community is echoed in Bennett et al.'s (2016), as cited in Watts (2024) notion that symbolic recognition is central to the moral economy of rural livelihoods. The study also highlights spirituality as a significant psychological anchor. Prayer, hope, and divine reliance functioned as critical mental health resources during hardship. These mechanisms parallel Tuliao et al.'s (2021), as cited in Bungay et al. (2023) findings on the centrality of religiosity in Filipino emotional resilience, particularly in rural and disaster-prone communities.

Themes such as "Peaceful resolution through communication" and "Resourcefulness" reinforce the argument by Obrist et al. (2010), as cited in Talwar et al. (2023) that resilience is not merely an individual trait, but a socially constructed and enacted process. Farmers reported tactful negotiation with neighbors and creative solutions like manual weeding or bartering for tools, reflecting strong community interdependence and embedded local knowledge (Vunibola et al., 2024). Themes related to purpose and identity "Farming as a meaningful sacrifice for future generations," "Farming as a way of life," and "Endurance and practical value of farming experience" emphasize the moral and symbolic dimensions of agricultural resilience. Farmers' metaphors of tools, trees, and animals to represent self-endurance echo the embodied resilience described by Troy et al. (2023). These expressions reflect inherited agrarian identities and intergenerational obligations, aligning with the cultural logic of rural sustainability (Panpakdee & Khanbut, 2025).

Demographics shaped these themes profoundly. Younger farmers (30.95%) often expressed optimism, social adaptability, and collective action, whereas older farmers articulated identity through resilience and long-term endurance. The low educational attainment (78.57% did not finish secondary school) contributed to reliance on traditional, low-cost coping strategies over innovative or mechanized methods (Akanmu et al., 2023). These demographic variables influence not only the nature of challenges faced but also the form and function of adaptive behaviors. While consistent with broader literature on rural resilience and climate stress (Sanusi & Dries, 2025; Taer & Taer, 2024), this study deepens the discourse by illuminating localized meanings and practices of endurance rooted in Misamis Occidental's sociocultural and ecological context. It shows that resilience in rural Mindanao is not only a function of adaptive farming or external aid but also of emotional strength, spiritual grounding, cultural memory, and collective negotiation. A limitation of this study is its single-province focus, which restricts broader generalization. Nevertheless, its depth-oriented and place-based design offers significant insights for policy and rural

development. Future studies may explore comparative analyses across other provinces or analyze how resilience strategies differ by gender, age, or indigenous knowledge systems.

4. Conclusions

This study illuminates the multifaceted nature of resilience among rural farmers in Misamis Occidental, Philippines, situating their lived experiences within the intersecting domains of physical, financial, environmental, cultural, and spiritual realities. The thematic analysis revealed that resilience is not merely a technical adaptation to external shocks but a deeply embedded process shaped by corporeal endurance, socio-emotional meaning-making, and faith-based coping mechanisms. Farmers' narratives of sacrifice, familial obligation, and identity-based perseverance underscore that resilience transcends survival, embodying an intergenerational moral economy that sustains agricultural livelihoods despite persistent adversity. From a theoretical perspective, these findings contribute to resilience scholarship by foregrounding its socio-cultural and symbolic dimensions. While existing literature often emphasizes structural resources such as access to credit, technology, and infrastructure this study demonstrates that resilience is equally constructed through intangible resources like spirituality, recognition, and intersubjective negotiation. By situating resilience within a constructivist lens, the study advances an understanding of resilience as a meaning-laden, socially co-produced phenomenon rather than a fixed trait or outcome.

Practically, the results point to the urgent need for integrated and culturally sensitive interventions in rural development. Policies that narrowly focus on economic inputs and climate adaptation technologies may overlook farmers' psychosocial and cultural foundations of resilience. Programs that combine financial mechanisms (e.g., subsidies, insurance, credit access) with wellness-centered initiatives (e.g., ergonomic training, rural mental health support, community recognition campaigns) are more likely to enhance sustainable resilience. Furthermore, the role of spirituality and collective communication in coping underscores the necessity for development frameworks that respect and harness local values, faith systems, and community networks. At a broader level, the study highlights the vulnerability of Philippine smallholder farmers within the global climate and market crises while showcasing their agency, ingenuity, and persistence. Resilience, as practiced in Misamis Occidental, is an evolving negotiation between hardship and hope, grounded in cultural continuity and a sense of purpose for future generations.

Future research should deepen this inquiry by conducting comparative, multi-site analyses across diverse agro-ecological and cultural contexts in the Philippines and Southeast Asia. Longitudinal designs are also warranted to capture how resilience strategies shift under compounded pressures such as prolonged climate disruptions, market liberalization, or demographic transitions. Examining gendered dynamics and indigenous knowledge systems will further enrich the discourse on resilience and inform more inclusive, equity-driven policies. Ultimately, this study underscores that building resilience in rural communities requires more than material support it demands recognition of farmers as cultural bearers, moral agents, and adaptive innovators whose voices and values must be central in designing pathways toward sustainable rural futures.

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Author Contribution

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Biographies of Author

Ma. Lecarme S. Susada, an Assistant Professor and a permanent faculty of the Department of Hospitality and Tourism, School of Business and Economics, University of San Carlos, Philippines. She holds a doctoral degree as Doctor in Philosophy in Management. Her area of expertise is on Sustainable Development, Community Based Tourism, Marketing Management, and Entrepreneurship.

- Email: mssusada@usc.edu.ph
- ORCID: 0000-0001-9722-8615
- Web of Science ResearcherID: N/A
- Scopus Author ID: N/A
- Homepage: https://usc.edu.ph/faculty/hospitality-management/susada-ma-lecarme