

Challenges faced by farm tourism in the province of Bulacan, Philippines during COVID-19 pandemic

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Abstract

This study determined the challenges faced by farm tourism in the Province of Bulacan, Philippines during COVID-19 pandemic. It sought to answer the extent of the effects of the external and internal factors to farm tourism in the Province when Philippine tourism re-opened during COVID-19 pandemic; what farm tourism operators did to fit their organizational structure; the farm tourism operators' assessment on the performance of their organization; and come up with a contingency plan based on the findings of the study. Anchored in Structural Contingency Theory by Donaldson (2015) as its theoretical framework, the study utilized mixed methods approach for the collection and analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data, leading to a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced by farm tourism in the Province of Bulacan during the COVID-19 pandemic. Results showed that COVID-19 pandemic affected the farm tourism in the Province of Bulacan by external factors namely: economic, socio-cultural, political, and environmental; and internal factors: people, structure, tasks, technological and financial. To keep the operation uninterrupted, strategies were implemented such as diversification, adherence to safety protocols, collaboration, utilization of social media, community engagement, enhanced customer communication and service, and financial management and cost reduction. As an outcome, there was a fit to their contingencies that led to increased number of visitors, higher or maintained number of manpower, maintained or decreased in expenses, and increase in income. Based on these favorable results, such strategies used on a contingency plan can be a recommendation for other farm tourism sites.

Keywords: external factors performance, farm, farm tourism, internal factors, Structural Contingency Theory

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1. Introduction

Community and agricultural riches abound in the Philippines. The Philippines' tourism industry is said to be a significant driver of development for the economy. Visitors from abroad grew by an average of 5.9% during the first two months of 2019 (Rocamora, 2019). According to the Department of Tourism (DOT), most of the country's farm sites are in Luzon (Talavera, 2019). The Province of Bulacan being in central Luzon, has great farm tourism potential because it is central to Manila's people and merchandise supply movement. In fact, there are already 15 farm tourism sites existing in the province that are presently operational. However, it is noteworthy to mention that farm tourism has labor competition with other industries since the province's industrialization has reduced agricultural land. Some farm operators have common problems of organization and management. Seasonal nature of farm products and services were also noted as problems. Some farm operators are encountering labor shortage while others are not yet prepared for visitors. Nonetheless, the situation was aggravated by COVID-19 pandemic outbreak that posed a great challenge to the farm operators as tourism industry was one sector that was hardest hit at that time. In the light of the situation, this study delved in determining the challenges faced by farm tourism in Bulacan during the COVID-19 pandemic and uncovered the strategies implemented that salvaged this industry in this area of tourism in Bulacan. With the hope that the results, findings, and recommendations from this study will be meaningful and essential source of valuable insights and information for future reference, the study further aimed the aforementioned will reach the awareness of the Department of Tourism and support may be extended to this budding industry in the province of Bulacan.

Objective of the study - This study was geared to determine the challenges that confronted the farm tourism in the province Bulacan during the COVID-19 pandemic and to further explore the measures taken by the farm owners and operators that preserved this sector amidst the global health crisis. The objective of this study was to identify and analyze the challenges encountered by farm tourism in the Province of Bulacan amid the COVID-19 pandemic. The specific aims were as follows: To assess the impact of external factors on farm tourism when Philippine tourism reopened during the COVID-19 pandemic, with a focus on economic, socio-cultural, political, and environmental dimensions. To evaluate the influence of internal factors on farm tourism when Philippine tourism reopened during the COVID-19 pandemic, considering factors such as people, structure, tasks, technology, and finance. To examine the strategies employed by farm tourism operators in aligning their organizational structure with the external and internal environment during the reopening of Philippine tourism amid the COVID-19 pandemic. This includes addressing challenges like the economic constraints of visitors, concerns about the COVID-19 virus, compliance with health protocols, and competition. To gauge farm tourism operators' perceptions of their organization's performance in the reopening of Philippine tourism during COVID-19, specifically in terms of the number of visitors, manpower, expenses, and income, based on the adjustments made to their organizational structure. To propose a contingency plan based on the data gathered, offering recommendations to address challenges and enhance the resilience of farm tourism operations in the face of uncertainties posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

2. Literature Review

This chapter presents different local and foreign literatures and studies pertinent to the study on the challenges faced by farm tourism in the Province of Bulacan during COVID-19 pandemic. As stated by Alcantara et.al, (2022), it was discovered that the pandemic had a substantial impact on the businesses' marketing operations, causing financial losses and changes to their business strategies. Their adaption tactics were divided

into two categories: sustaining and surviving. The farms' initial coping measures consisted of survival tactics including switching to a new market, lowering pricing, and using online marketing. Contrarily, sustaining methods, such as diversification and expansion, were also known as long-term solutions. The businesses that used both tactics offered a greater selection and had several accreditations. It is advised that agri-tourism businesses keep planning as the pandemic still poses a threat. They ought to think about using post-pandemic sustaining techniques. Because of COVID-19, there have been millions of job losses, severe economic hardships, and the closure of numerous businesses, particularly micro, small, and medium-sized businesses that catered to tourists or were in connected industries. Furthermore, a lot of people will have less money available for leisure pursuits, and social isolation and other control measures can make it challenging or unpleasant. Due to job losses and other sources of income loss, the demand for tourism has decreased overall (Helble and Fink, 2020).

In the paper of Grech, et. Al (2020), the COVID-19 virus, which has paralyzed the tourism industry and brought on an unparalleled worldwide economic catastrophe, is currently wreaking havoc on the world. This essay discussed the economics of COVID-19 lockdown, recovery, and the inevitable competition that will arise between nations for tourists who will become more in demand because they will be increasingly scarce. To entice travelers, nations compete with a range of incentives. But persistent first waves that last into July will deter travelers, further decreasing tourism profits and hastening the loss of jobs and bankruptcies in the impacted nations. Since the COVID-19 crisis influences the entire tourism industry, it will take a coordinated effort to reopen and rehabilitate places. Businesses and employees in the tourism industry are benefiting from economic stimulus plans, and several governments have also implemented tourism-specific measures. Authorities and business are concentrating their efforts on: lifting travel limitations, assisting companies in accessing liquidity supports, implementing new health guidelines for safe travel, and aiding in market diversification (OECD, 2020).

People will continue be wary of traveling even after the restrictions on inbound and outward travel are lifted because the COVID-19 risk perception encouraged passengers to stay close to home. The results of the study of Meng, et.al, (2021) imply that since the efficacy coefficient is larger than the anxiety and severity coefficients, travelers are more likely to resort to self-protection. To convince tourists that they are safe, travel- and tourism-related enterprises must place a high priority on cleanliness and hygiene. As stated by Soliku et. al, (2021), strict adherence and enforcement of the fundamental COVID-19 safety protocols, which include frequent handwashing with soap under running water, social seclusion, and the wearing of face masks, is another immediate measure that needs to be taken by everyone in tourist hotspots. There are needs such as restructuring of operations in the hospitality sector, particularly with regard to seating arrangements in restaurants, housing arrangements in accommodation rooms, and other common spaces like reception areas, swimming pools, and gym facilities, among others. Such restructuring steps can entail the temporary suspension of amenities including buffet meals, pool access, and accommodation rooms.

The COVID-19 pandemic's impact on a few Italian farms is the main topic of the paper of Mastronardi, et. Al (2020). The goal is to specifically look into how the health disaster has affected diverse farms, how they have responded, and what agricultural and rural policies they need to address the crisis. Agritourism, on-farm processing of produce (mostly cheese, olive oils, and fruits), bioenergy production, tastings and recreational activities, instructional farms, and leasing of farm machinery are some of these pursuits. The findings emphasize the value of networks and farm diversification in agricultural solutions for coping with the Covid-19 problem. Furthermore, it is discovered that various forms of diversification contain both synergies and trade-offs. The next round of rural development initiatives should expressly take into consideration these data' intriguing policy ramifications. The current COVID-19 pandemic has most severely affected the travel and tourism sector, which has come to a complete halt and contributed to a global economic disaster. The purpose of the essay titled "Agritourism Resilience against COVID-19: Impacts and Management Strategies" is to evaluate the effects and management practices of agritourism in Brunei. The results of the study show that the Brunei agritourism farms used the following strategies: (1) the diversification of economic activities toward product innovation and agribusiness expansion to mitigate tourism revenue loss; (2) digital transformation, such as contact tracing apps, the introduction of virtual tourism, as well as the use of social media to promote agritourism as a lower-risk

tourism; (3) adaptive human resources strategy by encouraging community capacity building; and (4) The tactics used by Brunei's agritourism farms should teach ASEAN nations and surrounding nations how to get ready for agritourism that is crisis-resistant in the future (Wei Lee Chin & Siti Fatimahwati Pehin Dato Musa, 2021).

As part of the Enhanced Community Quarantine (ECQ), which began on the island on March 16, the Philippine government closed the airports in Luzon on March 20. The pandemic's detrimental effects on the tourism industry's performance were already apparent far earlier. International visitor arrivals to the Philippines have been hampered by travel restrictions and measures implemented in other nations as early as January of this year. On the other hand, domestic visitors restricted their travel out of concern over COVID-19. The first quarter of this year saw a fall in international tourist receipts to PHP 85 billion, or 36% less than the same period last year, according to the Department of Tourism (Cabrera, et. Al, 2020).

In his study on "The future of farm tourism in the Philippines: challenges, strategies and insights," Yamagishi (2021) discovered that in order to create strategies and policies for the right stakeholders, one has to assess the difficulties that Filipino farmers encounter when diversifying their operations and managing farm sites. The Farm Tourism Development Act of 2016 fills a gap in the Philippines' potential for farm tourism due to its extensive agricultural area. The nation is relevant for farm tourism as a farm diversification approach to bolster revenue in rural communities because of its low agricultural yields. Despite possessing these potentials, significant improvements must be made in terms of physical attributes, product development, education and training, management and entrepreneurship, marketing and customer interactions, and government backing. The main disadvantage is that farmers lack the knowledge, experience, and capital investment necessary to turn their farms into farm tourism destinations. Thus, it is essential to cultivate entrepreneurial and hospitality abilities.

Ocampo (2022) said that during lockdowns, there is a slowdown in travel which creates a good opportunity to construct and upgrade infrastructure. This paves the way for the improvement of Philippine tourist products as well as the creation of new ones to accommodate shifting traveler preferences. According to a DOT domestic travel survey, tourists choose outdoor areas and activities and lean toward ecotourism, rural, and farm tourism. Additional open-air rural developments, a pattern to grow along with a rise in the number of tourists that visit the nation's shores was observed. Business owners will provide more farm tours to advertise locally grown, unique to the Philippines produce. PHILTOA has designed a number of travel packages that include outdoor activities as well as farm, nature-based, and gourmet tour packages that are primarily interzonal on the island of Luzon.

Esguerra's (2020) study on "Status of Agri-tourism Business in Central Luzon, Philippines: Basis for Development Plan", he found out that the primary goals was to describe the types of farmers that enter the agri-tourism industry, assess the state of their operations, identify the best practices and issues faced by these firms in Central Luzon, and use this information to create a growth strategy. Agritourism establishments met all the requirements for facilities and safety, were accessible family-run farms, members of organizations that support both agriculture and tourism. There were both domestic and foreign visitors, from all walks of life. Their primary service offerings included classes, seminars, workshops, and excursions. The best practices were found as having a referral mechanism, a hands-on approach, and stringent financial oversight. The challenges of operating agri-tourism farms at the same time included a labor scarcity, the fact that the industry was still in its infancy, price volatility, the seasonality of farm goods and services, a lack of people with the necessary expertise, and high startup costs.

Donaldson (2015) pointed out that Structural Contingency Theory holds that the effect on organizational performance of organizational structure depends upon how far the structure fits the contingencies such as uncertainty, strategy, and size. This theory contains three core elements that together forms its core paradigm. First, there is an association between contingency and the organizational structure. Second, contingency determines the organizational structure, because an organization that changes its contingency then, in consequence, changes its structure. Third, there is a fit of some level of the organizational structural variable to each level of the contingency, which leads to higher performance, whereas misfits lead to lower performance.

From the theoretical framework, the researcher came up with the conceptual framework of the study as shown on figure 1:

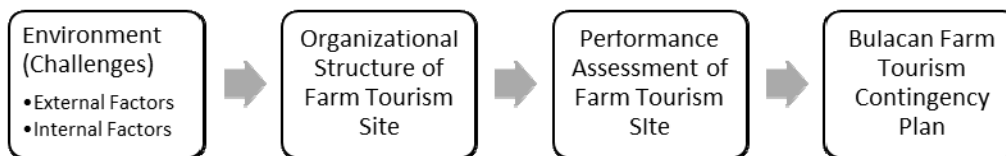


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework based on Structural Contingency Theory (2015)

The first frame set the boundaries of the farms in Bulacan. which refers to the external and internal challenges faced by Farm Tourism of Bulacan during COVID-19 pandemic. Internal contingency factors include tasks, technology, structure, and people in the farm. External factors on the other hand comprise of economic factors, environmental factors, political factors, and socio-cultural factors. It shows the association between contingency and structure, and contingency changes causing structural change. The second frame is on the organizational structure of farm tourism which entails the farm tourism operators do to fit their organizational structure to the external and internal environment in the re-opening of Philippine tourism during COVID-19 pandemic. The third frame deals on the performance assessment of the farms in Bulacan in the re-opening of Philippine tourism during COVID-19 as a result on how they fit their organizational structure to the external and internal environment posed by the pandemic. While fourth frame deals with Bulacan farm tourism contingency plan, as a recommendation for farm tourism operators to improve its performance during the COVID 19 pandemic.

3. Research Methodology

Research Design - In addressing the ultimate objective of the study, mixed method was utilized as the approach to inquiry. It is an approach that combines both quantitative and qualitative forms of research and involves philosophical assumptions. It encompasses collecting both quantitative and qualitative data with the core assumption that the employment of such approach will provide a more complete understanding of the research problem (Creswell, 2014). The implementation of this research design is meant to provide comprehensive results that will accomplish the objectives of the study. Quantitative approach was used to measure the level of extent of the effect of external and internal environment to farm tourism when Philippine tourism re-opened during COVID-19 pandemic. In the context of the study, this approach is most appropriate in the acquisition of data about how extensive were the effects of the internal and external factors to the re-opening of farm tourism which according to Creswell, 2014 are data that can be measured thus, can be analyzed using statistical procedures that will substantiate the results of the investigation. On the other hand the qualitative approach was used to gather responses during the interview to identify what farm tourism owners/operators did to fit their organizational structure to the external and internal environment and identify their assessment on the performance of their organization. Through this approach as Creswell, 2014 posits, an exploration and more comprehensive understanding of how the farm owners and operators dealt with the situation by identifying the strategies that they did to fit their organizational structure to the external and internal environment. This form of inquiry further provided information about the performance of their farms as a result of their abovementioned act. The integration of the qualitative approach to the quantitative approach of the investigation substantiated the findings of the study which according to Creswell 2014 is the purpose of the said research method.

Participants of the Study - There are 15 farm tourism sites in Bulacan which are all members of Bulacan Farm Tourism Association (BFTA). However, only ten (10) farm owners/operators from different municipalities of the province were the respondents of the study. Though all the 15 sites re-opened their businesses during COVID-19 pandemic based on the provided list of the Bulacan's Provincial History, Arts, Culture, and Tourism Office (PHACTO), only 10 were chosen to participate considering that two (2) farm owners/operator out of the

15 declined the request of participating while the remaining three (3) were used for the pilot testing. Due to a very limited number of respondents, total population sampling which is a purposive type of sampling technique was employed. As Dhivyadeepa (2015) posits, this is to assure that a comprehensive insight may be gathered from all the respondents and no pertinent information is missed out. This sampling technique reduces the risks of missing potential insights from those who are not included in the sample since every response is crucial when there is a very limited respondents.

Research Instrument - As the approach of the investigation is a mixed method approach, a combination of a survey questionnaire and interview guide questions were the primary instrument utilized in gathering the necessary data for the study. Thus, the instrument was divided into two parts: Part I is the survey questionnaire which provided the quantitative data about the extent of the effect of the internal and external factors to farm tourism in the time of pandemic. To quantitatively measure such extent, a 4-point Likert scale was used. The second part are the interview questions/guide that provided the insights of the farm tourism owners/operators about the strategy they employed to fit their organizational structure to the external and internal environment in the re-opening of Philippine tourism during pandemic and their insights about the performance of their organization at that time. The researcher-made instrument which was validated by area experts and a statistician. It was pilot-tested to three (3) farm tourism owners/operators who were not part of the respondents who went an extra mile by sharing few suggestions that were incorporated to the final questionnaire. The reliability of the survey questionnaire for the quantitative part was tested using SPSS software by the research statistician.

Ethical Consideration - The researchers furnished pertinent information to respondents prior to their completion of the questionnaire. Furthermore, this research adheres to and applies the ethical guidelines outlined by Resnik (2020). These principles encompass integrity, respect, proper acknowledgment of contributions, voluntary participation with the right to withdraw, protection from potential harm during data collection, confidentiality, anonymity, ensuring informed and full consent, and compliance with relevant laws like the Data Privacy Act of 2012 (Republic Act 10173), specifically Section 17 emphasizing the confidentiality, protection, and security of information gathered for research purposes exclusively.

Data Gathering Procedure - Subsequent to the passing of the research instrument from the validity and reliability tests and the permission to conduct the survey and interview to the farm tourism owners/operators, the researchers commenced the gathering of data by visiting each of the respondents in their farm. Prior to the conduct of surveying and interviewing the respondents, the researchers provided relevant information to the respondents which includes the following ethical principles, according to Resnik (2020), were considered, adhered, and applied in the conduct of this research: (1) Integrity and Respect, (2) Proper Acknowledgement, (3) Voluntary Participation, (4) Protection, (5) Confidentiality, (6) Anonymity, (7) Informed and with full consent, (8) Legality regarding relevant law or institutional policies such as the Data Privacy Act of 2012 or Republic Act 10173. Preceding the completion of the survey and interview to the ten (10) targeted participants which took a month to accomplish, the recorded in-depth interviews were transcribed and analyzed using thematic analysis. Audio files of interviews were reviewed, and responses were transcribed and coded in Microsoft Word. Individual identifiers were removed from all cases to ensure confidentiality and be replaced with unique log numbers.

Statistical Treatment - The researcher used a Likert Scale to numerically determine the level of the effect of external and internal factors to farm tourism when Philippine tourism re-opened during COVID-19 pandemic. Likert Scale for the Level of Extent of the Effect of External & Internal Factors

Scale	Range Of Values	Verbal Interpretation
4	3.50 – 4.00	Very Great Extent
3	2.50 – 3.49	Great Extent
2	1.50 – 2.49	Average Extent
1	1.00 – 1.49	Small Extent

4. Results and Discussion

Effect to Farm Tourism of External Factors

Table 1

Level of Extent of Effect of External Factors to Farm Tourism during COVID-19 pandemic

External Factors	Weighted Mean	Verbal Interpretation
Economic	3.10	Great Extent
Socio-cultural	3.10	Great Extent
Political	3.00	Great Extent
Environmental	1.50	Average Extent
Average Weighted Mean	2.66	Great Extent

Table 1 shows that farm tourism is generally affected by external factors during the COVID-19 pandemic on a great extent as evidenced by weighted mean of 2.66. This result may be expected knowing the fact that tourism industry is the hardest hit by the crisis at that time. Among the external factors, farm tourism was affected the most by economic and socio-cultural factors being both having the highest numerical assessment of 3.10. As economic factors pertain to the decrease on income and visitor spending during COVID-19 pandemic as people were forced to stay at home due to lockdowns, many experienced difficulties reporting to work and some are laid off from work resulting to non-generation of income at the end of farm owners/operators. As postulated by Helble and Fink (2020), COVID-19 caused unemployment of millions, severe economic hardships, and the closure of numerous businesses, particularly micro, small, and medium-sized businesses that catered to tourists or were in connected industries. This explains why economic factor a great extent of effect on farm tourism operators has considering the fact that people would naturally prioritize their basic needs in the midst of economic scarcity on top of travel and tour. Equal extent of effect is reflected by socio-cultural factor as health concerns were much considered as the pandemic is a severe threat to everyone. People will continue to be hesitant of traveling even after the restrictions on inbound and outbound travel are lifted because the COVID-19 risk perception restricted travelers to stay close to home (Meng, et.al, 2021).

Farm tourism is also seriously affected by Political factors as a weighted mean of 3.00 substantiate the result. As part of the Enhanced Community Quarantine (ECQ), which began on March 16, domestic visitors restricted their travel out of concern over COVID-19 and most of the tourism services sector temporarily stopped providing service or product, reduced the level of operations, and decreased the number of employees due to the low demand and constraints (Cabrera, et. al, 2020). Nonetheless, though all the external factors affected the farm tourism. Environmental factor effect is the least as it weighted mean of 1.50 is the lowest. This result may be explained by the fact that since tourism industry was shut down by the pandemic and the last to re-open at that time, external factor which refers to completion with other tourism sites in recovering customers' trust will still pose completion but not as intense as prior to pandemic since they are still in the process of re-establishing their business. This result may be validated by the finding in the study of Grech, et. Al (2020) which underscored the economics of COVID-19 lockdown, recovery, and the inevitable competition that will arise among nations for tourists who will become more in demand because they will be increasingly scarce.

Effect of Internal Factors to Farm Tourism

Table 2

Level of extent of effect of internal factors to farm tourism during COVID-19 pandemic

Internal Factors	Weighted Mean	Verbal Interpretation
People	2.10	Average Extent
Structure	1.60	Average Extent
Tasks	2.10	Average Extent
Technological	1.90	Average Extent
Financial	2.80	Great Extent
Average Weighted Mean	2.10	Average Extent

Table 2 shows that farm tourism in Bulacan is affected by internal factors at a generally average extent in terms of people, structure, tasks, technological, and financial, as reflected by the average weighted mean of 2.10. Business operations during that time experience difficulty in promoting, need to lay off workers, cut down operations temporarily, re-opening became costly, and loss in revenue was yet able to pursue. Notably, financial variables had the greatest impact on farm tourism in Bulacan as its weighted mean of 2.80 is the highest. Farms were affected by the pandemic as there were loss of revenue. Coupled with not having visitors, markets which is a place of distribution of their products were regulated in terms of schedule of opening and number of customers to be accommodated. As corroborated by the results of the study of Alcantara et al. (2022), pandemic had a substantial impact on the businesses' marketing operations, causing financial losses and changes to their business strategies. Though the structure factor had an average effect on farm tourism, the numerical rating of 1.60, which is the lowest, indicates that it has the least effect when compared with the other factors. Most farm owners opt to retain their employees for the farm to continue its operations even without visitors which is indicative of care for the welfare of the workers and their families in this time of pandemic. This result may be paralleled with the findings in the case study of Asian Development Bank (2021), where it was inferred that many business owners feel they have a moral duty to help and defend their employees, especially in these trying times. Additionally, given their crucial role in getting food to customers, agribusiness companies must place a high priority on the health and safety of their employees, who are regarded as frontline critical workers.

Strategies in Organizational Structure of Farm Tourism Operators

Based on interviews, this discussion explores diverse strategies adopted by farm owners during the COVID-19 pandemic, focusing on economic status, risk perception about COVID-19, health protocols set by the government, and market competition.

Economic Status - In response to economic challenges, farm owners implemented various strategies. Farm A diversified by introducing new plant varieties, tapping into the home gardening trend. Farm B processed mangoes to cater to the demand for processed goods, maintaining income despite reduced visitors. Farm C collaborated with the local government, stabilizing milk production. Social media usage emerged as a common approach, with farms like Farm D and Farm E leveraging platforms for promotion.

Risk Perception about COVID-19 - Diversification was a common response to travelers' risk perceptions. Farm A gradually imported plants, emphasizing continuous production. Farm F focused on development and agricultural activities despite financial limitations. Collaboration played a role, with farms like Farm D benefiting from TESDA and Farm G participating in the Kadiwa program. Adherence to safety protocols was prominent, with farms like Farm H limiting visitors to local farmers and relatives.

Health Protocols Set by the Government - Adhering to government health protocols, farms like Farm A faced challenges due to strict regulations, leading to decreased visitors and increased expenses. Farm I prioritized staff safety and external deliveries. Farm B implemented cost-saving measures by hiring on-call staff. Some farms, like Farm H, opted to close to the public, emphasizing safety protocols even within their own family.

Market Competition - Farm owners recognized the importance of diversification to stay competitive. Farm A's success was attributed to a diverse product range, while Farm E highlighted unique offerings. Collaboration and mutual support were emphasized, with farms like Farm D serving as a training ground for others. Farm I actively promoted and assisted other farms, fostering a collaborative agritourism community. In addressing these challenges, farm tourism operators demonstrated adaptability, resilience, and a sense of community. These strategies align with findings by Dubbelink et al. (2021) on the impact of digital channel adaptation in marketing and Mastronardi et al. (2020) emphasizing the value of networks and farm diversification in coping with the challenges posed by COVID-19. The collective efforts of farm owners showcased their commitment to maintaining a safe environment, sustaining operations, and fostering growth within the agritourism community.

Performance Assessment

In evaluating the performance of farm owners during the COVID-19 pandemic, the assessment is based on key attributes: number of visitors, number of manpower, expenses, and income.

Number of Visitors - Several farms, including Farm B, Farm D, Farm J, Farm E, Farm G, and Farm E, reported a low number of visitors. In contrast, farms like Farm A, Farm C, Farm H, and Farm I experienced an increase in visitors. The successful strategies implemented by the latter group involved diversification, adherence to safety protocols, collaboration, and effective utilization of social media, tailored to their specific circumstances.

Number of Manpower - Some farms, such as Farm A, Farm D, Farm E, and Farm G, maintained their manpower levels. Others, including Farm C, Farm H, Farm J, and Farm I, increased their manpower. In contrast, Farm B and Farm F reported a decrease in the number of manpower. The strategies employed by these farms mirrored those for attracting visitors: diversification, adherence to safety protocols, collaboration, and effective use of social media.

Expenses - A subset of farms, including Farm B, Farm C, Farm H, Farm J, Farm G, and Farm I, reported increased expenses. Conversely, farms like Farm A, Farm D, Farm E, and Farm I indicated that their expenses remained unchanged. The strategies adopted to navigate increased expenses involved adherence to safety protocols, collaboration, community engagement, enhanced customer communication and service, and financial management and cost reduction.

Income - Regarding income, Farm A, Farm B, Farm J, Farm G, and Farm I reported low income. Conversely, Farm D, Farm C, Farm E, and Farm F noted an increase in income. The implemented strategies for income generation included diversification, community engagement, and collaboration, aligned with the farms' unique circumstances. The performance assessment of farm owners during COVID-19 reveals a diverse landscape influenced by the strategic choices made in response to challenges. Farms that adapted through innovative strategies such as diversification, collaboration, and effective use of digital platforms demonstrated resilience and success amidst the uncertainties of the pandemic.

Contingency Plan: Farm Tourism Operators in the Re-opening of Philippine Tourism during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Rationale: The contingency plan provides a strategic framework for farm operators to navigate the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. It addresses economic hardships, prioritizes visitor safety, promotes innovation and diversification, and fosters collaboration and community support. By following the plan, farm operators can not only survive but also thrive in the face of adversity, contributing to the revival and growth of the farm tourism industry in the Province of Bulacan, Philippines.

Vision: Adapt the organizational structure to the external and internal environment of Farm Tourism in Bulacan during the re-opening of tourism amidst the COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 3

Strategies Matrix

GOAL #1: To develop into Farm Tourism in the New Normal

OBJECTIVES	STRATEGIES
1.1 Offer diversified and innovative farm tourism products by the end of the month	1.1.1 Identify and introduce new plant varieties or products that align with the current trends and demands. 1.1.2 Conduct market research to understand customer preferences and adapt the farm's offerings accordingly. 1.1.3 Explore partnerships with local businesses to create value added products from farm 1.1.4 Implement online sales platforms and encourage visitors to make purchases through e-commerce channels.
1.2 Adhere to the safety protocols and hygiene	1.2.1 Develop and implement comprehensive safety protocols in line with government guidelines and recommendations.

measures upon reopening	1.2.2 Provide training to staff on health and safety procedures, including proper hygiene practices and the use of personal protective equipment. 1.2.3 Display signage throughout the farm premises to remind visitors of safety measures and social distancing guidelines. 1.2.4 Offer sanitization stations and handwashing facilities at key locations in the farm. 1.2.5 Regularly sanitize high-touch surfaces and frequently visited areas.
GOAL #2: To maintain and attract farm tourism visitors amidst pandemic	
OBJECTIVES	STRATEGIES
2.1 Increase in number of customers through social media and online marketing by the end of the first quarter	2.2.1 Establish a strong online presence through social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube. 2.2.2 Create engaging and informative content about the farm, showcasing organic farming practices, and highlighting safety measures implemented. 2.2.3 Regularly update social media accounts with farm news, events, and promotions. 2.2.4 Collaborate with influencers or vloggers to reach a wider audience and attract potential visitors. 2.2.5 Implement online booking systems to manage visitor flow and ensure compliance with health protocols.
2.2 Enhance customer communication and service by the end of the month	2.2.1 Develop a customer communication strategy to address concerns and provide updates on farm operations, safety protocols, and availability of products or services. 2.2.2 Offer delivery services for farm products, enabling customers to enjoy the farm experience from their homes. 2.2.3 Implement feedback mechanisms to gather customer insights and continuously improve services.
GOAL #3: To achieve viability of farm tourism business during pandemic	
OBJECTIVES	STRATEGIES
3.1 Improve financial management and cost reduction by the end of the year	3.1.1 Conduct a thorough review of operational expenses and identify areas where costs can be reduced without compromising quality and safety. 3.1.2 Explore government programs, grants, or loans that support farm tourism operators during challenging times. 3.1.3 Optimize existing resources and workforce, considering flexible staffing arrangements and on-call workers to manage costs effectively.
3.2 Practice collaboration and networking throughout the end of the year	3.2.1 Establish collaborations with local government units (LGUs) to disseminate important information and coordinate efforts in promoting farm tourism. 3.2.2 Join or form farm tourism associations to share best practices, exchange ideas, and collectively address challenges. 3.2.3 Engage in networking activities to build connections with other farm operators, travel agencies, and tour operators to attract visitors.
3.3. Promote community engagement and support throughout the end of the year	3.3.1 Foster strong relationships with the local community, neighboring farms, and relevant stakeholders. 3.3.2 Collaborate with educational institutions, technical training centers, and government agencies to provide training programs, scholarships, and education opportunities related to farming and agriculture. 3.3.3 Engage in community outreach activities, such as sharing surplus produce, participating in local events, and supporting community initiatives.

5. Conclusion

Wherefore, taking into consideration all the data gathered, statistically treated, analyzed, interpreted, and presented together with the findings, this study is lead to the following logical conclusions. Farm tourism in the Province of Bulacan was affected by the COVID-19 pandemic in terms of economic, socio-cultural, political, and environmental as external factors and people, structure, tasks, technological and financial as internal factors. To continue to be a Farm Tourism Destination and fit their organizational structure to the external and internal environment in the re-opening of Philippine tourism during COVID-19 pandemic, diversification, adherence to safety protocols, collaboration, utilization of social media, community engagement, enhanced customer communication and service, and financial management and cost reduction were the strategies implemented. Upon implementation of these strategies, there is a fit to their contingencies that leads to higher number of visitors, higher or maintained number of manpower, maintained or decrease in expenses, and increase in income. Those strategies were used on a contingency plan that can be a recommendation for other farm tourism sites.

Limitation and Recommendation - The study is limited to the members of Bulacan Farm Tourism Association who re-opened during COVID-19 Pandemic. The respondents were identified from the fifteen (15) farm tourism sites which re-opened during COVID-19 pandemic according to Provincial History, Arts, Culture, and Tourism (PHACTO) of the Province of Bulacan. Ten (10) farms served as the respondents while other five (5) farms are requested for pilot testing but two of those declined the request. The data-gathering took place from April to May 2023.

Based on the presented conclusions, the following recommendations are offered:

- Farm tourism owners/operators may consider offering diversified and innovative farm tourism products such as introducing new plant varieties or products that are not commonly offered in the market, and have safety protocols and hygiene measures like offering sanitization stations and handwashing facilities be part of the Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) of the establishment to ensure health safety and security of its visitors at all times even without pandemic.
- Farm tourism owners/operators may consider engaging in social media and online marketing (or intensify it if they already into it) to make the public aware and informed about what their business and what they can offer to the former at the same time enhance customer communication through social media platform and maintain quality service to attract and retain farm tourism visitors.
- Improvement of farm tourism business viability at all times especially in times of crises like the pandemic through close monitoring of their financial management and cost reduction, collaboration and networking with other businesses or NGOs in projects or activities that will result to a win-win situation. These will further promote community engagement and support.
- To make the province competitive in the market, tourism stakeholders in Bulacan such as the LGUs and private sectors may create and establish Famers' Market where farm tourism products all over the province may be availed by the public.
- Future researchers with similar topic may conduct a similar study and make the findings generalizable and focus on the misfit relationship of contingencies employed by the farm tourism owners/operators in the time of pandemic and structures of establishment.

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