Cateris Paribus Journal E-ISSN : 2775-6718
Volume 6 Nomor 1 Maret 2026

THE EFFECT OF RICE SHARECROPPING ON FARMERS' AND LANDOWNERS' WELFARE IN PITU RIAWA AND DUA PITUE SIDENRENG RAPPANG

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Abstract

The agricultural sector, particularly the food crops subsector, is the backbone of Indonesia's rural economy. However, most farmers do not own their own land and therefore rely on the tenant farming system as a means of livelihood. This study aims to analyze the impact of the rice sharecropping system on the welfare of tenant farmers and landowners in Pitu Riawa and Dua Pitue subdistricts, Sidenreng Rappang Regency. This phenomenon is important to study because the dominant practice of verbal profit-sharing agreements is prone to creating legal uncertainty and economic injustice, as mandated for protection under Law No. 2 of 1960 on Profit-Sharing Agreements. The study employs a qualitative method with a descriptive approach. Data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews with 10 tenant farmers and 10 landowners, and field documentation. The results indicate that the tenant farming system makes a significant contribution to tenant farmers' household income, enabling them to meet daily needs, cover education costs, and save. For landowners, this system provides passive income while maintaining land productivity. Profit-sharing agreements are made verbally with proportions varying between 50:50 and 60:40. The success of the system is influenced by external factors such as weather, pests, and water availability. This study recommends formalizing agreements in writing, as well as government support in the form of fertilizer subsidies, irrigation improvements, and the provision of agricultural tools.

Keywords: Rice Farmland, Profit-Sharing System, Farmer Welfare, Landowners, Farmworkers.

INTRODUCTION

The agricultural sector is one of the main pillars of Indonesia's economy, particularly in rural areas. According to data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS, 2024), the agricultural sector employs approximately 28.6% of the total national workforce, making it the sector with the largest share of employment. South Sulawesi, as one of the national rice production centers, recorded a total area of 654,818 hectares of rice paddies (BPS, 2023), with Pitu Riawa District having 6,673 hectares of rice paddies and Dua Pitue District having 6,122 hectares in 2024. This significant agricultural potential has not yet fully translated into improved well-being for farmers, particularly those who do not own their own land.

The phenomenon of inequality in agricultural land ownership in Indonesia has existed for a long time and is one of the root causes of rural poverty. Farmers who do not own land must seek alternative livelihoods, one of which is through the tenant farming or sharecropping system. Tenant farming is defined as a plot of land that is worked and utilized by another party, either with or without the consent of the rightful owner, with or without a specific time limit, as stipulated in the Decree of the Head of the National Land Agency (BPN) No. 2 of 2003. This system brings together two parties who need each other: tenant farmers who do not own land but have farming skills, and landowners who own land but are unable or unwilling to manage it themselves (Marniati, 2020).

The relationship between landowners and tenants is governed by several legal instruments. Law No. 5 of 1960 on the Basic Agrarian Principles (UUPA) recognizes the existence of temporary land rights, including sharecropping rights. More specifically, Law No. 2 of 1960 on Share-Crop Agreements (UUPBH) regulates the procedures, conditions, and legal protections for both parties in agricultural land cultivation agreements. The UUPBH requires that agreements be made in writing and ratified by the village head and sub-district head, with the

aim of providing legal certainty and protection for tenant farmers as the economically weaker party. However, in reality, as found in various studies, profit-sharing agreements in the field are still predominantly conducted orally based on trust and long-standing customs, without adhering to the provisions of the UUPBH (Lumbantoruan, 2022; Swarajustisia, 2025).

This gap between regulations and on-the-ground practices gives rise to various issues: uncertainty regarding the duration of cultivation, potential conflicts over profit-sharing, and the lack of adequate legal protection for farmers. On the other hand, this informally operated profit-sharing system has actually proven capable of providing tangible economic benefits for both parties. Cahyono and Lestari (2020) demonstrate that profit-sharing cooperation patterns in rice farming, based on trust and social capital, can create income stability for farmers even without formal protection. Hidayatullah (2023), in his study in Gowa Regency, found that the profit-sharing system consistently increases the income and food security of tenant farmers' households, contributing an average of 60–70% to total family income.

Although there has been a considerable amount of research on agricultural land-sharing systems, most studies have focused on legal and technical aspects of agriculture. Studies that comprehensively integrate the economic well-being of farmers, benefits for landowners, external factors influencing the system's success, and policy implications within a specific regional context remain relatively limited. This study aims to address this gap by focusing on the sub-districts of Pitu Riawa and Dua Pitue in Sidenreng Rappang Regency, an area with a strong tradition of rice sharecropping that has yet to be extensively studied academically.

Based on this background, this study aims to: (1) analyze the contribution of the rice sharecropping system to the economic well-being of tenant farmers; (2) identify the benefits of the sharecropping system for landowners' productivity and income; (3) describe the prevailing patterns of agreements and profit-sharing mechanisms; and (4) identify external factors that influence the success of the tenant farming system in improving the welfare of both parties.

METODE PENELITIAN

This study employs a qualitative research method with a descriptive approach. The qualitative approach was chosen to explore the in-depth narratives and experiences of the informants, ensuring that the data collected can holistically represent the socioeconomic reality of the tenant farming system (Fadli, 2021). Through the direct experiences of tenant farmers and landowners, this study produced rich descriptive data on the dynamics of profit-sharing cooperative relationships, including dimensions of well-being, agreement patterns, and challenges faced. The research was conducted in Pitu Riawa Subdistrict and Dua Pitue Subdistrict, Sidenreng Rappang Regency, South Sulawesi. These two subdistricts were selected because they possess significant potential for rice farming land 6,673 hectares and 6,122 hectares, respectively (Sidrap Regency BPS, 2024) as well as a tradition of the profit-sharing system that has been passed down through generations.

Informants were selected using purposive sampling based on the consideration that they could provide relevant and in-depth information regarding the research issues. The informants consisted of 10 tenant farmers and 10 landowners, for a total of 20 informants. The selection criteria for tenant farmers included: having farmed someone else's land for at least one harvest season; being a permanent resident of one of the study districts; and being willing to provide information openly. The criteria for landowners included: owning rice fields that are farmed by others; and residing in or having active involvement in the study area.

Data collection was conducted using three complementary techniques, as recommended in qualitative research (Sugiyono, 2022). First, non participant observation, in which the researcher observed the rice field locations, agricultural activities, and the socio-economic conditions of the informants without directly participating in the farming process. According to Sugiyono (2022), non-participant observation allows researchers to obtain authentic contextual data on the phenomenon under study without influencing the subjects' behavior. Second, in-depth interviews using a semi-structured interview guide to gather information on farming experiences, the profit-sharing system in place, impacts on well-being, and challenges faced. Moleong (2021) emphasizes that in-depth interviews are a primary technique in qualitative research for uncovering the holistic meanings and experiences of research subjects. Third, field documentation in the form of records of land conditions, irrigation systems, and existing agreement documents, if available. Documentation serves as a supplementary data source that strengthens and confirms data from observations and interviews (Sugiyono, 2022). Data validity is ensured through source triangulation, namely confirming information from farmers with statements from landowners and field observation data, in accordance with the principle of

triangulation proposed by Moleong (2021) as a strategy to enhance the credibility of qualitative data.

Data analysis in this study employed the interactive analysis model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014), which consists of three concurrent and iterative phases throughout the research process. According to Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014), qualitative data analysis is the process of systematically searching for and organizing data obtained from interviews, field notes, and documentation, so that findings can be easily understood and communicated to others. The three stages of analysis are as follows. First, data reduction, which is the process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting, and transforming raw da In this study, data reduction was conducted by sorting and focusing on data relevant to the research objectives specifically, data directly related to the tenant farming system, profit-sharing mechanisms, and their impact on the well-being of tenant farmers and landowners. Irrelevant data was eliminated to ensure a sharper and more focused analysis (Miles, Huberman, and Saldana, 2014). Second, data presentation (data display), which involves organizing the reduced set of information into a format that allows for drawing conclusions. In qualitative research, data presentation is typically done in the form of descriptive narrative text, tables, or charts that illustrate patterns of relationships among themes (Miles, Huberman, and Saldana, 2014). In this study, data are presented in narrative descriptions organized based on the main themes derived from interviews and observations, namely contributions to income, profit-sharing mechanisms, land productivity, and external factors influencing the system's success. Third, conclusion drawing and verification, which is the stage where the researcher derives meaning from the presented data and conducts verification to ensure that the conclusions drawn are valid and consistent with the field data. Verification was conducted through data triangulation, which involves confirming findings from interviews with farmers using statements from landowners and observational results, in accordance with Sugiyono's (2022) principle of triangulation, which states that triangulation is a data collection technique that combines various sources to enhance the credibility of research.

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Research Findings

1. Characteristics of Informants

The twenty informants involved in this study comprised two groups that differed significantly in terms of land ownership status and socioeconomic conditions. The tenant farmer group was dominated by male heads of household aged 35–55 years with an educational background ranging from junior high school to senior high school. Most tenant farmers have no other steady job besides farming, making the produce from their plots the family's primary source of income. The area of land cultivated varies between 40 ares and 2 hectares per season. Meanwhile, the landowner group is generally older (50–70 years old), having relinquished cultivation due to physical limitations resulting from advanced age, living far from the land, or being occupied with other work.

2. The Contribution of Tenant Farmland to Tenant Farmers' Income

In-depth interviews with 10 tenant farmers revealed that the tenant farming system serves as the primary source of income, providing economic stability for their households. Before gaining access to tenant farmland, most of the informants relied on casual work with highly fluctuating incomes. After gaining access to cultivated land, they have more regular income following the harvest cycle, generally twice a year when supported by adequate irrigation.

Of the 10 tenant farmers interviewed, all stated that income from crop yields is used to meet basic household needs, including daily food expenses, children's education costs, and small savings for urgent needs. Mr. Malik achieved the highest harvest yield, recording a significant increase in the fourth season due to optimized water management and the use of high-yielding varieties. Meanwhile, most of the other informants maintained relatively consistent yields across seasons. A representative statement from the informants affirmed that the cultivated land provides a sense of economic security they previously lacked.

Irrigation water management is a critical factor in determining land productivity. River water is the primary source of irrigation, but its distribution must be carefully regulated: excess water triggers snail infestations that damage young rice stems, while water shortages cause plant stress and crop failure. Farmers who successfully optimize water management by adjusting volumes according to rice growth stages, implementing irrigation rotation, and routinely maintaining irrigation channels consistently achieve higher and more consistent

harvest yields.

3. Profit-Sharing Systems and Mechanisms

The profit-sharing patterns applied by the informants generally follow traditional systems agreed upon verbally. The most common system is ‘maro’ or a 50:50 split, where the total harvest is divided equally after deducting agreed-upon production costs. However, some informants apply a 60:40 split, with the landowner receiving a larger share (60%) if they cover operational costs such as the purchase of fertilizer and fuel for water pumps. Conversely, if the tenant farmer covers all production costs, the split may shift to 60% for the tenant farmer.

All profit-sharing agreements identified in this study were made verbally, without written documentation and without approval from the village head or subdistrict head, as required by Law No. 2 of 1960 on Profit-Sharing Agreements. Reasons cited by informants included: kinship ties between landowners and farmers fostering mutual trust, the ease and simplicity of oral procedures, and a lack of awareness regarding formal procedures mandated by law. This situation aligns with the findings of Lumbantoruan (2022) and similar studies across various regions of Indonesia, which indicate that the UUPBH has not been effectively implemented at the level of farming communities.

The duration of the agreement is flexible and does not have a strict time limit. Most agreements continue automatically from season to season as long as there are no changes in circumstances on either side. If the landowner wishes to terminate the agreement, the customary practice is to notify the tenant farmer before the next planting season begins, so that the tenant farmer has time to find another plot of land to cultivate.

4. Land Productivity and Benefits for Landowners

From the landowners' perspective, the sharecropping system has proven to be a profitable solution for maintaining land productivity while earning passive income without direct involvement in the farming process. All landowner informants stated that without the sharecropping system, their land would potentially be neglected and unproductive, which in the long run could reduce soil fertility and the economic value of the land.

The cooperation between owners and sharecroppers creates a mutualistic symbiotic relationship: owners receive a share of the harvest regularly, while sharecroppers gain access to land for farming. Some landowners also provide a portion of production inputs such as seeds or fertilizers, which are then compensated through a higher proportion in the profit-sharing arrangement. This scheme provides incentives for sharecroppers to maintain the land optimally, as higher crop yields will increase the share they receive.

5. External Factors Affecting the Success of the System

The success of the sharecropping system in improving the welfare of both parties is heavily influenced by external factors beyond the direct control of the farmers. First, weather and climate conditions are the most dominant factor. Prolonged dry seasons causing irrigation water shortages, or excessive rainfall triggering floods and crop disease outbreaks, directly reduce harvest productivity and the income of both parties. Second, pest attacks—particularly snail and rat infestations—pose a threat that sharecroppers routinely face. Several informants reported losses of up to 30–40% of total harvest due to pest attacks in certain seasons. Third, the availability and condition of irrigation infrastructure greatly determine cropping intensity. Land that depends solely on rainwater is generally only able to produce once per year, while land with access to technical irrigation can produce two or more times.

6. Expected Government Support

All informants, both sharecroppers and landowners, expressed high expectations for increased government support to optimize the sharecropping system and improve farmers' welfare. The most frequently expected forms of support include: (1) the provision of subsidized fertilizers that are more easily accessible and distributed in a timely manner; (2) the construction and maintenance of better irrigation networks; (3) the provision of agricultural tools and machinery, especially tractors and planting machines; and (4) ongoing agricultural extension services on modern rice cultivation technology and integrated pest management. Beyond technical aspects, some more educated informants also mentioned the need for socialization regarding legally compliant profit-sharing agreement procedures, so that the rights and obligations of both parties are formally protected.

Discussion

1. The Profit-Sharing System as a Mechanism for Redistributing Land Access

The findings of this study confirm that the sharecropping system functions as an economically effective mechanism for redistributing land access, even though it operates outside the formal framework established by regulations. From the perspective of institutional economics, this system reflects what North (1990) refers to as an "institutional arrangement" based on informal norms that emerge from repeated social interactions and produce a relatively stable equilibrium. Strong trust and social relationships among the actors serve as a substitute for the formal mechanisms that should be implemented through the Profit-Sharing Law (UUPBH).

The most commonly applied 50:50 profit-sharing proportion aligns with the principle of distributive justice in agricultural economics theory, where the distribution of profits should be proportional to the contributions of each party (land capital vs. labor and working capital). However, this study also demonstrates that the proportion can shift flexibly depending on who bears the production costs, reflecting institutional adaptation to changing economic conditions. These findings are consistent with Cahyono and Lestari (2020), who found that the pattern of profit-sharing relationships in rice farming in Central Java is also flexible and contextual, adjusted to the capabilities of each party.

2. Impact on the Welfare of Sharecropping Farmers

The contribution of the sharecropping system to the welfare of sharecroppers can be analyzed through three main dimensions: income, food security, and social capacity. In terms of the income dimension, the research findings indicate that access to sharecropped land consistently increases sharecropper household income from what was previously uncertain to more regular earnings following the harvest cycle. This supports the argument of Hidayatullah (2023) that the profit-sharing system contributes 60–70% to the total household income of sharecroppers. This increase enables sharecroppers to meet basic needs that were previously difficult to achieve, including children's education costs, which represent a long-term human capital investment.

In terms of the food security dimension, the practice of storing a portion of the harvest for personal consumption, as reported by several informants, constitutes a rational household food security strategy. Marniati (2020), in her study in Bone Regency, found a similar pattern in which rice sharecroppers tend to allocate 20–30% of their harvest for family consumption reserves before selling the remainder. This strategy provides a buffer against fluctuations in rice prices on the market, ensuring that household food security is maintained even when the selling price of unhusked rice is low.

In terms of the social capacity dimension, the sharecropping system also strengthens social networks and social capital in rural communities. The trust that serves as the foundation of verbal agreements indirectly reinforces social cohesion and norms of reciprocity among community members. Nevertheless, dependence on trust without formal legal protection also creates vulnerability, particularly when disputes arise or unexpected changes in conditions occur.

3. Benefits for Landowners and Land Productivity

From the landowners' perspective, the sharecropping system represents an optimal solution for addressing the classic problem of absentee landlordism a condition in which landowners are unable or unwilling to manage their land directly. Without the sharecropping mechanism, such lands would potentially be neglected and experience productivity degradation. In this context, the profit-sharing system functions as an efficient resource allocation instrument: land is channeled to those who have the ability and willingness to manage it productively.

The incentive structure within this system has also proven to work effectively. Sharecroppers have a strong motivation to maintain and optimize land productivity because the share of the harvest they receive is directly dependent on production performance. This creates an alignment of interests between owners and sharecroppers, which represents an ideal condition in agricultural contract theory. This finding is consistent with Ghufron and Melati (2022), who demonstrated that a well-designed profit-sharing system is capable of creating productive incentives for sharecroppers.

4. The Gap Between Regulation and Practice: Legal and Policy Implications

The finding that all agreements are conducted verbally without following the procedures of the Profit-Sharing Law (UUPBH) constitutes a structural issue that requires serious

attention. Law Number 2 of 1960 requires that profit-sharing agreements be made in writing, witnessed by the village head, and ratified by the sub-district head, with the aim of providing legal certainty and protection for the economically weaker party in this case, the sharecropper. The ineffectiveness of the UUPBH in field practice is not a new phenomenon and has been widely documented in the literature (Swarajustisia, 2025; Lumbantoruan, 2022; Neliti, 2023).

The fundamental issue is not merely legal non-compliance but rather a mismatch between the regulatory design and the socio-cultural reality of farming communities. Verbal agreements based on trust have functioned effectively within the context of intimate and recurring social relationships. Forced formalization without considering this cultural dimension has the potential to add administrative burdens without providing meaningful additional protection. Therefore, a more effective policy approach may involve developing a simple written agreement format that is easily understood by farmers with low levels of education, accompanied by agricultural extension workers or village officials, rather than rigid formal enforcement.

5. External Factors and Implications for System Stability

The vulnerability of the sharecropping system to external factors particularly weather, pests, and water availability represents a systemic risk inherent to the agricultural sector in general. In the context of profit-sharing, this risk is borne jointly by the owner and the sharecropper, which theoretically creates a better risk balance compared to a land rental system in which the sharecropper bears the entire production risk. However, the absence of formal risk management mechanisms such as agricultural insurance renders both parties equally vulnerable to extreme events such as floods or prolonged droughts.

Irrigation infrastructure serves as a critical variable determining the intensity and stability of production. Land with good access to technical irrigation is capable of producing two or more times per year, which directly doubles the income of both parties. Government investment in the construction and maintenance of irrigation is therefore not merely an infrastructure investment but a direct investment in the welfare of sharecropping farmers and landowners. Triwidia et al. (2024) confirm that irrigation infrastructure has a positive and significant influence on rice productivity and farmer welfare.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

Based on the research findings and discussion, it can be concluded that the rice sharecropping system has a significant positive influence on the welfare of both sharecropping farmers and landowners in Pitu Riawa and Dua Pitue Sub-districts, Sidenreng Rappang Regency. This system functions effectively as a mechanism for redistributing land access that provides income stability for landless sharecroppers and passive income for landowners who are unable to manage their land themselves. The profit-sharing pattern applied—generally ranging from 50:50 to 60:40 depending on the contribution to production costs—reflects the principle of distributive justice agreed upon by both parties through deliberation.

Nevertheless, this study identifies two structural issues that require attention. First, all agreements are conducted verbally without following the provisions of Law Number 2 of 1960 concerning Profit-Sharing Agreements, meaning that the rights and obligations of both parties are not formally protected and are vulnerable to potential conflicts. Second, the success of the system is highly dependent on external factors such as weather, pests, and the availability of irrigation infrastructure, which are beyond the control of farmers, making government support an essential prerequisite for the sustainability of this system.

Recommendations

Based on the research findings, several policy and practical recommendations can be put forward. First, the Sidenreng Rappang Regency Government needs to encourage the formalization of profit-sharing agreements through the development of a simple written agreement format that is easily understood by farmers, accompanied by assistance from agricultural extension workers and village officials, without eliminating the flexibility of agreements that has been a strength of the system thus far. Second, the construction and maintenance of irrigation infrastructure must be a government investment priority, given that water availability is the most determining factor for productivity and cropping intensity. Third, the accessibility of fertilizer subsidy programs needs to be strengthened at the sharecropping farmer level, including simplified administration and timely distribution in accordance with the planting calendar. Fourth, agricultural extension services on modern cultivation technology, integrated

pest management, and agricultural risk management need to be carried out regularly and on an ongoing basis. Fifth, for future research, it is recommended to expand the geographic scope and incorporate quantitative analysis of income levels, as well as to examine the potential for developing agricultural insurance as a risk management instrument for both sharecropping farmers and landowners.

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