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Editorial:
Agribusiness Marketing, its Challenges and Current Trends

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INTRODUCTION

A Concept of Agribusiness

In October 1955, J.H. Davis introduced the concept of "agribusiness" at a conference that was held in Boston. He wrote a paper titled “From Agriculture to Agribusiness”, and it was published in January 1956 (Davis, 1956). Subsequently, over a year later, the concept of agribusiness was defined and explained in detail in *A Concept of Agribusiness* (Davis and Goldberg, 1957).

According to Davis and Goldberg (1957), agribusiness is defined as all activities involved in the early production and final distribution of agricultural supplies and the storage, processing, and final distribution of farm products and goods. This means that agribusiness in the modern context essentially includes the functions that agriculture was defined to have 150 years ago. Buzzwords associated with the idea of agribusiness include distribution systems, supply chain management, food safety, marketing strategies, etc. According to Chen (2021), the agricultural sector is a vital part of the economy in countries with arable land because agricultural products can be exported.

Many industrialised countries' agribusiness growth has been attributed to factors driving the industry's increasing competitiveness domestically and internationally. An excellent example is in Asia and Latin America, where infrastructure, innovation, and trade liberalisation have resulted in increased agricultural productivity, which in turn has contributed significantly to the GDP Wilkinson & Rocha (2009). Changes in the agricultural industry are primarily driven by consumer demand, as consumers worldwide are becoming wealthier. As a result, consumers demand higher quality and more diverse products that are healthier and more nutritious (Cameron, 2006).

Producing agricultural products for domestic consumption, the agricultural sector has made a substantial contribution to the Malaysian economy for many years. Since gaining independence in 1957, Malaysia's economic structure has changed considerably. The economy has shifted

from a traditional agriculture-based economy to a manufacturing-based economy in which the service sector is currently the leading contributor.

Federal Agricultural Marketing Authority (FAMA)

FAMA's vision is to be "The leading authority in food and agricultural product marketing" while highlighting its mission as "To boost consumer value by creating an efficient and successful food and agriculture marketing chain". The Federal Agricultural Marketing Authority (FAMA) was established in 1965 under Act 141 (Federal Agricultural Marketing Authority Act 1965) as a marketing agency within the Malaysian Ministry of Agriculture and Food Industry (MAFI). FAMA is responsible for marketing agro-food products such as vegetables, fruits, floriculture, and agro-based industry products. FAMA aims to oversee, coordinate, regulate, and develop agribusiness and marketing in the region while also accelerating the local and international marketing sectors, such as expanding the market size for agro-food products and increasing produce revenue. FAMA is also tasked with ensuring that commodities in the agricultural and food industries are accessible and affordable to consumers. The organisation has intensified its efforts to increase efficiency across the entire marketing chain to fulfil its responsibility through:

(1) Development of market channels
(2) Development of marketing infrastructure
(3) Entrepreneurship development
(4) Product marketing development
(5) Development of marketing regulations

Journal of Agribusiness Marketing (JABM)

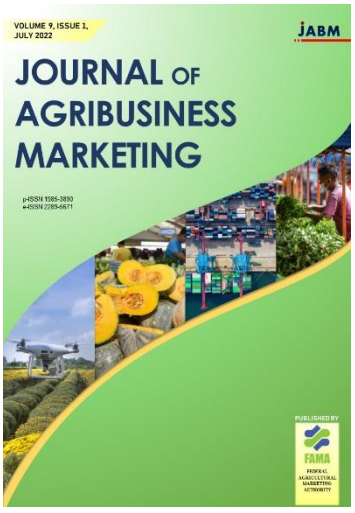

Figure 1: JABM Cover Page

Published semi-annually (January and July), the Journal of Agribusiness Marketing (JABM) provides access to academic and scientific research in agricultural marketing. The journal mainly focuses on but is not limited to studies related to agribusiness and marketing. As an international and peer-reviewed journal initiated by FAMA, JABM welcomes papers related to the marketing of food and agricultural products worldwide. Submissions on developing marketing infrastructure and supply chain systems; global and local demand for food and agricultural products; human resource capacity building in agricultural marketing through knowledge and cutting-edge technology; and stakeholder behavior are encouraged.

Manuscripts received are subjected to a double-blind peer-review before publication in the journal. In the event a manuscript has been judged suitable for this publication by the Managing Editors, it is then sent to a minimum of two reviewers for double-blind peer review. Depending on the reviewer's recommendations, the paper may be accepted as is, returned for revision with comments, or rejected. The double-blind peer review ensures that the authors are allowed to

revise their manuscripts as much as possible before they are submitted for publication in JABM.

Since 2008, The journal has progressed very well. However, despite these achievements, the journal's growth has remained stunted. Particular issues that led to the decline were mainly inconsistent management. Other concerns would be irregular publication as well as a lack of diversity (such as expertise and nationality) and commitment to the publishing of the editorial board members, which hampered its growth. An article's publication is not the only aspect of managing a journal. Additionally, it promotes the intent of the publisher (FAMA) as well as facilitates networking and collaboration. In conjunction with the ever-growing industry, it will be imperative that productive efforts can be taken to ensure that JABM can become a platform that facilitates the exchange of ideas and works by experts, researchers, practitioners, students, and FAMA staff itself.

The purpose of journals is to document a communal body of knowledge rather than just the intellectual accomplishments of individual researchers. Scientific journals serve as repositories for storing and disseminating scientific works, making them the center of the scientific endeavour. Hence, FAMA intends to rebuild its journal (JABM) to disseminate relevant knowledge and practical information. In early 2022, the journal was re-established. Since then, the journal has undergone several initiatives to rebuild itself, including adding new editorial board members and holding physical workshops. Due to the involvement of FAMA and the consultant team that assisted in reviving the journal, the journal is back on track and undergoing positive changes; it currently has 26 diverse board members from more than ten countries.

National Agricultural Policies

As a set of strategic guidelines for Malaysia's agricultural industry, the government created an official document regarded as the agricultural policy, and it is understood that in Malaysia, there are two periods where agricultural policies are developed. Such as before independence (1948-1957) and after independence (1957-2020). Malaysia's agricultural sector is separated into two sectors: industrial crops and agro-food crops. Palm oil, rubber, and cocoa account for 86% of Malaysian agricultural land. At the same time, fruits and vegetables comprise the remaining 14% of agro-food commodities production (Dardak, 2018). In the period leading up to independence, the framework was intended to resolve issues regarding plantation crops, such as rubber, oil palm, and cocoa, that mainly served the interests of the British colonials.

The period from 1984-1990 is marked by a significant transformation and development in the Malaysian economy. During this period, Malaysia had abundant agricultural land (Haji Haron et al., 2001), and the manufacturing sector was thriving compared to the agricultural sector. The agricultural sector faces challenges such as favourable policies toward manufacturing, labour shortages, rising production costs, and competition for land with other economic sectors. (Dardak, 2018). Thus, a greater emphasis was placed on expansionist policy, as most investments were in infrastructure and land development to increase palm oil production (Haji Haron et al., 2001).

Policies following independence were primarily aimed at reducing poverty among farmers, and the framework relies on how to enhance farmers' incomes to minimise the country's poverty rate. (Dardak, 2018). The first National Agricultural Policy (NAP 1) was intended to address these issues closely related to rural poverty and unequal income distribution between traditional and commercial farmers. As a continuation of NAP 1, the second National Agricultural Policy (NAP 2) was established. However, NAP 2 is more concerned with agro-food productivity and efficiency, which is why this policy was developed to address difficulties in meeting the demand for agro-food products (Dardak, 2018).

Revised after the previous (NAP 2) version, NAP 3 was established. It examines the difficulties Malaysia's agricultural sector encountered during 1997-1998 when the Asian Financial Crisis (AFC) affected Malaysia's financial market (Dardak, 2018). Due to the rapid liberalisation of agricultural trade and the 1997 financial crisis, which further liberalised the financial market, the currency market has become volatile and highly susceptible to speculation. As a result of these events, Malaysia's food supply has been negatively impacted (Haji Haron et al., 2001).

The environment has become more dynamic and competitive due to globalisation and rapid growth in the global economy. Not only does this situation threaten the agro-food industry, but it also presents opportunities and challenges for the nation's economy. The first National Agrofood Policy (NAP 1.0) put forth for the period 2011 to 2020 seeks to give more attention to boosting the agro-food industry's efficacy at every stage of the supply chain. This is in line with ensuring that the industry is more productive, competitive, and knowledge-intensive while ensuring that more attention is given to developing food commodities.

Concerns about global food security have also risen in recent years, particularly in Malaysia, as the cost of staples like rice has increased dramatically. On the other hand, climate change is expected to make it more difficult for paddy production and vegetables and fruits to ensure food security in the future (Federal Agricultural Marketing Authority (FAMA), n.d., pp. 3–7). Multiple strategies were designed and introduced to ensure food security. Since food security is an issue that the Malaysian government must address, one of its first steps has been to establish reasonable food prices by developing a monitoring system and early warning systems for food prices (Federal Agricultural Marketing Authority (FAMA), n.d., pp. 3–7).

Further to that, the government devised and promulgated the National Agrofood Policy 2.0 (NAP 2.0) for the term 2021 to 2030, a precedent to the National Agrofood Policy 1.0. The NAP 2.0 is made up of key strategies that focus on a competitive and innovative agro-food sector through initiatives such as facilitating businesses, ensuring the well-being of food producers, and a paradigm shift toward a sustainable food system as a climate change adaptation strategy. Paddy and rice, fruits and vegetables, animals, and fisheries are among the specific target sectors.

The NAP 2.0 considers demographic changes, shifting dietary patterns, and environmental issues related to climate change requiring technology-enabled agronomy and plantation management techniques. In the face of emerging trends and challenges, it is expected that National Agrofood Policy 2.0 will replace National Agrofood Policy 1.0 as the primary policy for Malaysia's agro-food industry. For the strategy to succeed, it will depend on the successful

implementation of its 21 strategies and 77 action plans until 2030, which will place significant responsibilities on the shoulders of numerous departments and agencies.

A growing global population, decreased arable land, increased demand for food consumption, and even a global crisis that reduces crop yields have placed a strain on the nation's ability to feed its people. Consequently, it appears that National Agrofood Policy 2.0 has acknowledged these limitations and is moving in the right direction. Toward the aspirations of NAP 2.0, the economic, social, and environmental aspects have been incorporated into a policy framework. NAP 2.0 outlines policies that emphasise modernisation and smart agriculture through the intensification of research. Enhancing market access, developing human capital, and fostering conducive business ecosystems through land use, finance, infrastructure, investment, and governance (Ministry of Agriculture and Food Industries (MAFI), 2022).

CHALLENGES AND TRENDS IN AGRIBUSINESS MARKETING

Challenges in Agribusiness Marketing

It comes with no doubt that every ever-growing industry may face multiple challenges in its era of growth. A wide range of issues plague the agricultural industry; some are inherent, while others result from a particular circumstance. The agricultural and agribusiness sectors face several challenges, including the following.

Food Stresses

Demand for food is increasing, driven by population growth and rising calorie consumption (Figure 2). In 1950, the world's population was just over 2.5 billion; by 2011, it had grown to seven (7) billion. The world's population is growing at a rate of 200,000 people per day, which is expected to reach 9 billion by the year 2050. Nine (9) billion people will need to be fed by the end of 2050 (Maienfisch & Stevenson, 2015). This global population increase will necessitate an even more significant increase in agricultural production.

Population growth and land scarcity will lead to the need for a further increase in food production per hectare of land. In the 1950s, one hectare could feed two people; by 2030, it will have to feed five (Figure 3). The demand for food is already outpacing the amount of food that can be produced, and farmers must be able to produce more with less input (Maienfisch & Stevenson, 2015). So much farmland has been permanently repurposed for other more lucrative uses that it no longer serves any purpose. Lucrative uses entail the development of more land for purposes other than agriculture, which has a minimal impact on agricultural production. Returning to land for agriculture has historically been a lower priority than other endeavours (Haji Haron et al., 2001).

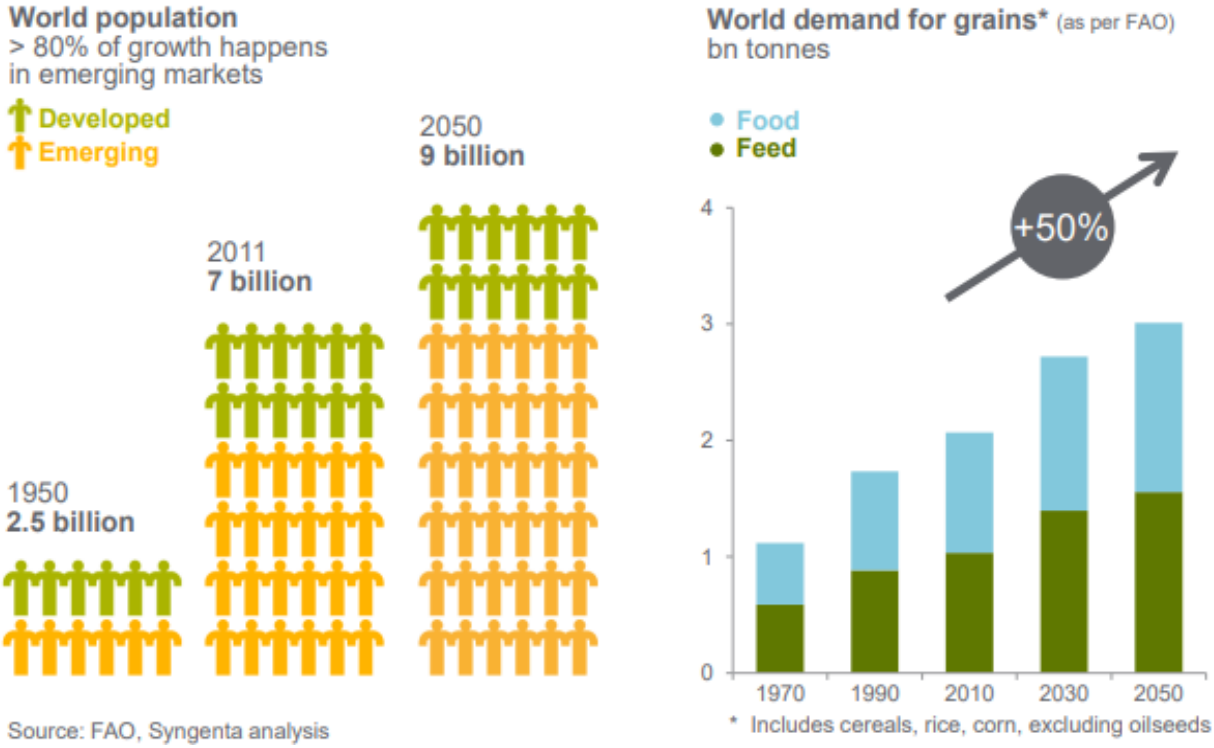

Figure 2: Population growth
Source: (Sygenta Corporation, 2015)

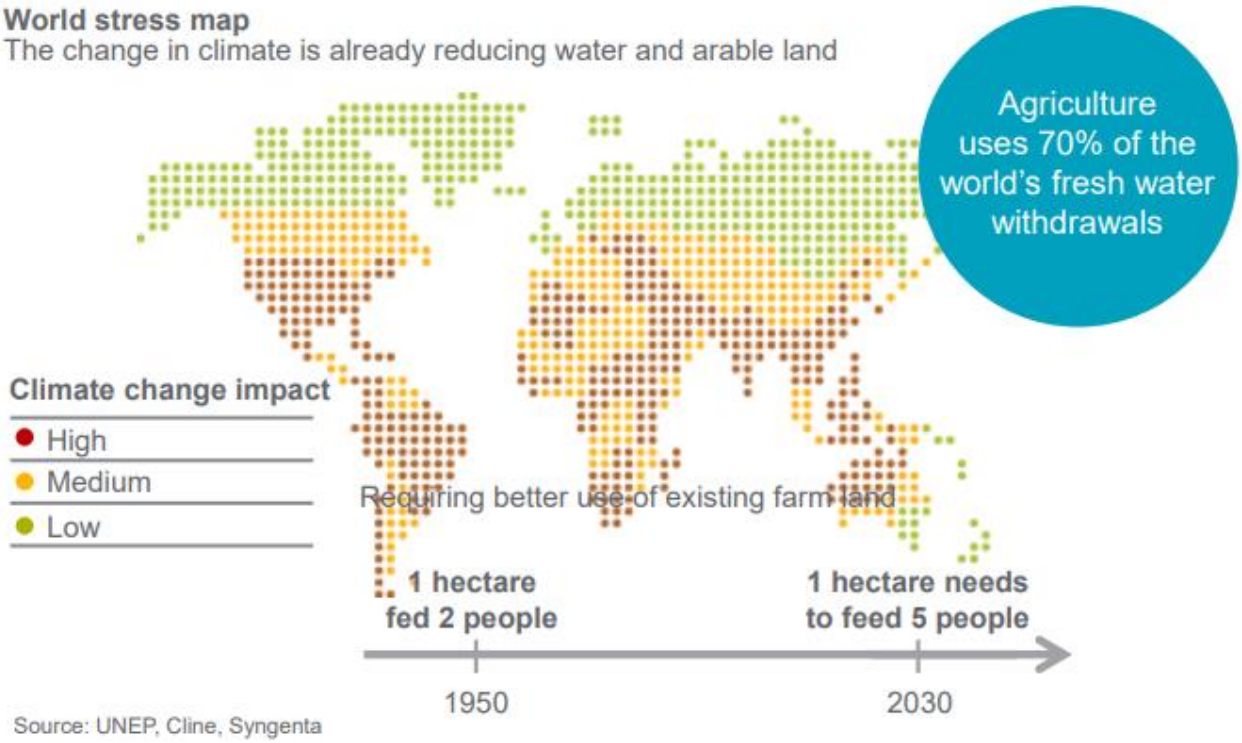

Figure 3: World Stress Map and increasing food consumption.
Source: (Sygenta Corporation, 2015)

Slow Market Adaptability

Reaching customers was one of the most challenging aspects of running a business during the recent Covid-19 pandemic. Regardless of their sector, all businesses are compelled to adjust to the worldwide pandemic. This is because foreign and local governments have mandated stringent measures to protect the citizens and stop a major outbreak from occurring. The Covid-19 pandemic has also triggered the supply and demand of agricultural products. Additionally, activities like marketing have stalled. Furthermore, a lack of marketing skills is a challenge in the agribusiness industry as adapting to new marketing strategies may imply more costs, such as conducting a feasibility study on the strategy's effectiveness.

A lack of proper education would also contribute to farmers' lack of marketing skills, resulting in their lack of marketing expertise. The Covid-19 pandemic and other factors, such as climate change, result in unpredictable production and marketing shocks that place smallholder agriculture under increasing pressure. Having been affected by Covid-19, farmers are forced to find new solutions. Long-term problems such as the collapse of marketing channels may also add to farmers' stress levels.

Talent Shortage

Youths, particularly in Malaysia, are not keen on the agricultural sector. The reasons are youths' poor perception of the agro-food sector being labor intensive and having low returns compared to careers in the administrative setting (Ministry of Agriculture and Food Industries (MAFI), 2022). Agricultural practices are not just passed down through generations; young people are key to reshaping the industry and the communities in which it thrives (Man, 2022). In addition, young entrepreneurs face challenges such as land availability and labour costs competition from foreign workers, which also reduces farmers' income in the agro-food industry (Ministry of Agriculture and Food Industries (MAFI), 2022).

It cannot be denied that foreign labour has been of great assistance in overcoming labour shortages in Malaysia, regardless of the industry it belongs to. In 2013, 66% of the agricultural workers were over the age of 50 (Nor et al.,2015). "Dirty, dangerous, and difficult" (3D) jobs have been the subject of much discussion. Local job creation could be hindered by a large number of foreign workers in the private sector, which could lead to wage disparities (Central Bank of Malaysia, 2018)

Ageing farmers, rural-urban migration, and 3D associations with agricultural jobs led to a labour shortage in the sector. As a result, Malaysia has relied heavily on foreign workers in the industry, accounting for 27% of all foreign workers in the country in 2017, or 611,000 workers. As a result, Malaysia has been relying on foreigners to work in the sector, taking the country's largest share of foreign workers—27% in 2017, equivalent to 611,000 workers (Deloitte, n.d.).

Trends in Agribusiness Marketing

The role of agriculture is far beyond placing food on people’s tables; agriculture is the foundation for a functioning society and a stable economy.

Like other industries, the agriculture industry's stakeholders are not immune to market disruptions caused by changing consumer behaviour and business innovation. All members of the value chain, from farmers to investors and the government, must be aware of and consider the effects (Deloitte, n.d.).

Food Security

Population growth in most countries, especially in developing countries such as Malaysia, poses a severe threat to food security. With the rapid population growth, demand for food is expected to increase by 70% to 100% by 2050. Therefore, food security needs to be given more serious attention as it is essential in Malaysia's economic growth while meeting the population'.

"Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life." (FAO, 2001). In NAP2.0, food security is defined as when "all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.

In strengthening national food security, the National Food Security Framework (KSMN), which includes four (4) main components, namely availability, accessibility, utilisation and stability, and sustainability, has been developed. These key components are in line with the latest concepts recommended by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). FAMA implements interventions related to food security through two (2) main elements, namely availability and affordability.

IR4.0 Revolution

NAP 2.0 was developed in alignment and support of other national development agenda policies, including Vision for Shared Prosperity 2030 (WKB 2030) and Malaysia's Five Year Plan. A component that stands out compared to its predecessor policy (NAP 1.0) is the recognition and integration with components of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) through aligning with related sectoral policies such as the National Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) Policy and the Malaysian Digital Economy Blueprint.

The Malaysian government launched the Policy of the Industry Revolution (IR4.0) in 2018 as a new strategy to boost productivity growth, with priority initially given to the manufacturing sector, followed by services and other sectors, including agriculture. On the part of the agriculture sector, the government has introduced Agriculture 4.0 as one of the strategies to increase its productivity, efficiency, and competitiveness. The focus is on capacity building (skill and trained workforce or laborers) and providing infrastructure that could speed up the application of digital technology in Malaysia (Fauzi and Rozhan, 2020).

NAP2.0 focuses on the modernization of the agricultural sector through the application of Industrial Revolution 4.0 (IR4.0) principles such as the Internet of Things (IoT), Big Data, Blockchain, Artificial Intelligence, and others. To improve production and ensure transparency

in the supply chain of food and agricultural products, FAMA has developed an application based on blockchain technology known as Agro Food United (Agrofun).

Digitalisation

Digital technology and big data are two main components that could lead to the transformation of the agriculture sector in Malaysia. Malaysia has one of the most conducive environments for digital marketing. Most areas are urbanised, and the citizens are well-educated, showing a total literacy rate of 94%. The country's modern attitude also reflects its rapidly growing online population.

26 million of Malaysia's 32.16 million population are now online, where 81% are active social media users. The country has an 83% Internet penetration rate, one of the highest in Southeast Asia. In the era of global digitalisation and the introduction of new technologies, most of the activities are transformed from classical marketing to digital marketing due to the relatively lower cost of studying, and the processing speed of big data has enhanced product promotion (Robul, 2020)

Towards the digitisation of marketing, FAMA has developed a marketplace platform named Agrobazaar Online. Until Jun 2022, as many as 7,660 entrepreneurs have registered in the Agrobazaar Online portal involving 20,165 SKUs (stock keeping units) with a cumulative sales value of RM9.5 million.

CONCLUSION

The global agricultural landscape is evolving rapidly. As Malaysia's leading authority in food and agricultural product marketing, FAMA is taking the necessary steps to ensure that the agribusiness industry will thrive. Apart from the revival of JABM to disseminate knowledge relevant to the sector, FAMA is also increasing efficiency across the entire marketing chain. The trend is also growing and has many potential impacts on the economy. Agribusiness today, as compared to the past, is more advanced thanks to technological advancement. As technology progresses, agricultural production will be seamless.

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