ปัจจัยที่ส่งผลต่อความสำเร็จของการทำเกษตรอินทรีย์ของเกษตรกรรุ่นใหม่: กรณีศึกษาเกษตรกรในภาคตะวันออกเฉียงเหนือตอนบน ประเทศไทย

Key Factors Affecting the Success of Young Farmers in Organic Farming: A Case of Farmers in the Upper Northeastern Region of Thailand

มงคล ด้วงเขียว[1] กฤติยา ทองคุ้ม[2] ตะวัน ฉัตรสูงเนิน[3] และทศพร คิวประสพศักดิ์[4]
Mongkon Duangkhiew, Krittiya Tongkoom,
Tawan Chatsungneun, and Tossapond Kewprasopsak
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บทคัดย่อ

การศึกษาครั้งนี้มุ่งเน้นการค้นหาและวิเคราะห์ปัจจัยความสำเร็จ รวมถึงนิยามของความสำเร็จในการทำเกษตรอินทรีย์ของเกษตรกรรุ่นใหม่ในประเทศไทย โดยการเก็บข้อมูลเชิงคุณภาพโดยเกษตรกรรุ่นใหม่จำนวน 18 คนที่มีอายุไม่เกิน 45 ปี จาก 5 จังหวัดในพื้นที่ภาคตะวันออกเฉียงเหนือตอนบนของประเทศไทย โดยได้รับการแนะนำจากสำนักงานส่งเสริมเกษตรของแต่ละจังหวัดในการเลือกเกษตรกรรุ่นใหม่เพื่อเป็นกลุ่ม

[1] วิทยาลัยนานาชาติ มหาวิทยาลัยแม่โจ้ จ.เชียงใหม่ (International College, Maejo University, Chiang Mai, Thailand), Email: chiangmai461@gmail.com
[2] อาจารย์, วิทยาลัยนานาชาติ มหาวิทยาลัยแม่โจ้ จ.เชียงใหม่ (Lecture, International College, Maejo University, Chiang Mai), Email: krittiya_tk@mju.ac.th
[3] ผู้ช่วยศาสตราจารย์, วิทยาลัยนานาชาติ มหาวิทยาลัยแม่โจ้ จ.เชียงใหม่ (Assistant Professor, International College, Maejo University, Chiang Mai), Email: tawan@mju.ac.th
[4] อาจารย์, คณะเศรษฐศาสตร์ มหาวิทยาลัยเชียงใหม่ (Lecture, Faculty of Economics, Chiangmai University), Email: tossapond.kew@cmu.ac.th

ตัวอย่างในการเก็บรวบรวมข้อมูล โดยเกษตรกรรุ่นใหม่จะต้องทำเกษตรอินทรีย์มาแล้วอย่างน้อย 3 ปี โดยมีการเก็บข้อมูลจากการสัมภาษณ์เชิงลึก การสังเกตและมีส่วนร่วมจากกิจกรรมประจำวันในการทำเกษตรอินทรีย์ของเกษตรกรรุ่นใหม่ดังกล่าว รวมถึงการเข้าร่วมกิจกรรมประชุมกลุ่มเครือข่ายเกษตรกรแบบมีส่วนร่วม ผู้วิจัยได้ใช้วิธีวิเคราะห์เฉพาะเรื่อง (Thematic Analysis) โดยการถอดรหัสข้อมูลจากไฟล์เสียงและการบันทึก โดยได้จัดกลุ่มตามหมวดหมู่ของคำตอบที่ได้

ผลการวิจัยอภิปรายภายใต้ 3 ประเด็น ได้แก่ 1. แรงบันดาลใจที่ทำให้คนรุ่นใหม่ตัดสินใจกลับบ้านมาทำเกษตร 2. นิยามของความสำเร็จในการทำเกษตรอินทรีย์ 3. ปัจจัยที่ส่งผลต่อความสำเร็จในการทำเกษตรอินทรีย์ ผลจากการวิเคราะห์ข้อมูลของนิยามความสำเร็จในการทำเกษตรอินทรย์ที่มีอิทธิพลต่อการพัฒนาฟาร์มของเกษตรกรรุ่นใหม่ซึ่งประกอบด้วย 7 มิติ ได้แก่ 1. ความสำเร็จด้านรายได้ 2. ความสำเร็จด้านการมีอาหารปลอดภัยและความมั่นคงทางอาหาร 3. ความสัมพันธ์ของสมาชิกในครอบครัว 4. ความสำเร็จในการพัฒนาฟาร์ม 5. ความสำเร็จในการใช้ชีวิต 6. ความสำเร็จด้านความรู้และการส่งต่อความรู้ 7. ความสำเร็จด้านกลุ่มและเครือข่าย โดยเกษตรกรกลุ่มกรณีศึกษาไม่ได้ประสบความสำเร็จครบทั้ง 7 ด้าน เกษตรกรบางคนยังต้องพบกับความท้าทายและอุปสรรคอย่างต่อเนื่องในการทำเกษตรอินทรีย์ การทำเกษตรอินทรีย์ของเกษตรกรรุ่นใหม่ยังได้แสดงให้เห็นถึงปรากฏการณ์การเปลี่ยนผ่านเชิงแนวคิดและวิธีการภายใต้สังคมแห่งเทคโนโลยี นอกจากนั้นแล้ว ความสำเร็จในบางมิติยังส่งผลต่อเกษตรกรรุ่นใหม่ให้เกิดแรงบันดาลใจในการกำหนดเป้าหมายที่สูงขึ้น โดยเฉพาะด้านการสร้างรายได้ การมีอาหารปลอดภัยและความมั่นคงทางอาหาร และการได้อยู่ใกล้ชิดกับสมาชิกครอบครัว ความสำเร็จในมิติดังกล่าวเป็นส่วนสำคัญในการสร้างความเป็นอยู่ที่ดีในชุมชน

คำสำคัญ: เกษตรอินทรีย์ ปัจจัยความสำเร็จ นิยามความสำเร็จ

Abstract

This study aims to identify and analyse key success factors in organic farming and definitions of success for young organic farmers in Thailand. Qualitative data was gathered from 18 young farmers under 45 years of age from 5 provinces in the upper northeastern region of Thailand which were

recommended by the Provincial Agriculture Extension Office to specify young farmers who have practiced organic farming for at least 3 years through in-depth interviews at their farms and participatory observation during network meetings. Thematic analysis was applied to analyse the data by transcribing the voice recordings and field notes to decode the keywords and categorise them as themes.

The results are discussed under three themes: Goals inspiring young people to return home to farm; Definitions of success in organic farming; Factors influencing success. It was found that organic farm success was categorised into seven dimensions influencing young farmers' continued and enhanced organic farming. However, not all young organic farmers have reached all seven dimensions of success; some still face daily challenges and obstacles. The organic farming of young farmers also reflects the phenomenon of the transition of their mindset and practices in the context of technologisation. Nevertheless, achieving success in some dimensions has strongly encouraged young farmers to aim for higher ambitions, especially income generation, safe food and food security, and living with family, which leads to well-being in the community.

Keywords: Organic farming, Success factors, Success definition

Introduction

Organic farming has become an increasingly attractive occupation among young people in Thailand. According to the database on organic agriculture, Thailand has 1,403,441 Rai (224,551.56 ha.) of organic farmland, and export volume is 35,588 tons/year, mainly to UAS, China, Italy, and Switzerland, due to the consumer trend in health and environment (Office of

Agricultural Economics, 2023). In addition, many types of organic agriculture are desirable to young farmers, for instance, organic agriculture learning centres, organic farm-stay where visitors can join farm activities, new farming techniques that people can practice, and unique branding that attracts people to purchase their products. These activities are a new occupation in the digitalisation era, and the most attractive occupation for young people who work in the city is life design with income creation (Thai PBS, 2023).

On the other hand, an unstable economy is another crisis that affects young people, especially those who work in the city. They have to work under pressure, but with low wages compared to daily expenditures, so many young people are saturated with work because life is a circle: "Go to work and come back home to rest." This phenomenon reflected life devaluation (Thai Volunteer Service, 2022). These situations occur to those who live in the city; many resign from their job and return to their homeland to start farming with a strong faith that organic agriculture is an alternative job after returning, and they can adapt knowledge and experiences from their previous jobs to the farm (Somkaun et al., 2021). Moreover, the crisis from the COVID-19 pandemic has also affected people, especially those who live in the cities. Many were laid off from their job due to the safety restrictions and infection prevention that directly affected them, and they were in a hard life. Positively, the Thai society structure, particularly the ESAN culture, is family and kinship, and it was the right time for young people to return home in order to take care of their families (Thai Volunteer Service, 2023).

However, returning home and initiating farming of young farmers is often not as smooth as expected. Many young farmers face problems of limited knowledge and experience, inadequate welfare and labour protection, inconsistent income, acceptance from people in the community, and hardships and challenges in working with nature (Rayasawath, 2018). Some

face insurmountable challenges and have been forced to abandon their farms and return to the city (Unchaisri, 2022).

To tackle these problems, the Thai government and non-government organisations have initiated different projects to support young farmers in various activities in their communities, such as Young Smart Farmer Project (Jansuwan & Zander, 2021), KhonklaKuentin Project (Khonklakuentin, 2020), Return Homeland Project (Thai Volunteer Service, 2022) and other projects. Through these projects, young people undergo training and exchange to develop their farms and transfer agricultural knowledge to others interested in farming. Different projects have been provided to support young farmers in achieving the goal of successful farming, such as training, technology and innovation support, building groups and networks, and marketing support. These supports are helpful for young farmers, and many of them can achieve the success goal. Meanwhile, some cannot achieve their dreams due to the difficulties and challenges they have to confront daily, which force them to abandon their dream and return to the cities for jobs. The occurring phenomenon has motivated the researchers to question and find out the key factors affecting the success of young farmers in organic farming.

Literature Review

1. Organic agriculture

The term "organic agriculture" was used in 1940 by Lord Northbourne, who proposed a systemic approach that forms the core of organic agriculture today. It is fundamental to understanding the decisions of the organic agriculture community, such as its opposition to transgenic crops and foods, its discomfort with mainstream commercialisation, and its recent steps toward including social and ethical issues in organic agriculture (Lotter, 2003). Later

on, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the World Health Organization (WHO) defined the concept of organic agriculture as a holistic production management system that promotes and enhances agro-ecosystem health, biodiversity, biological cycles, and soil fertility (Sligh & Cierpka, 2007). Similarly, the International Federation of Organic Agriculture (IFOAM) has also defined organic agriculture as a production system that sustains the health of soils, ecosystems, and people. It also combines tradition, innovation, and science to benefit the shared environment and promote fair relationships and good quality of life for all involved (Luttikholt, 2007). Sources from published literature emphasise that organic production follows natural processes, using local materials and natural energy to balance biodiversity, improve animal welfare, and improve soil and water fertility (Badgley et al., 2007; Chinvarasopak, 2015). It is a holistic approach to production where "the soil is the heart of the cycle" (Kroma, 2006). In Thailand, the Ministry of Agriculture has defined organic agriculture as stopping agrochemicals by returning to the natural farming system and applying bio-fertilisers to restore soil quality (Benchasri, 2010). It is also one of the most dynamic and rapidly growing sectors of the global food industry, especially in developing countries (Cary & Wilkinson, 1997).

However, it is quite challenging for consumers to reach organic agricultural products. It is complex for new farmers to convert from conventional farming to organic farming. Organic producers have to comply with the rules and regulations of organic production. Farmers also need time for a conversion period of at least three years, which can often be more prolonged for livestock production (Cranfield et al., 2010). Despite this, the main factor influencing them to do organic production is "Motivation" (Fairweather, 1999). After converting to organic farming, they expressed satisfaction with with life (Sullivan et al., 1996).

In Thailand, numerous organisations that work on food and agriculture issues, including governmental organisations, provide programs and offer market opportunities to increase the number of organic producers and farmland. The government reported that organic farmers covered an organic agriculture area of 1,348,155 rai in 2022, which increased from the previous years (Figure 1) (Office of Agricultural Economics, 2023).

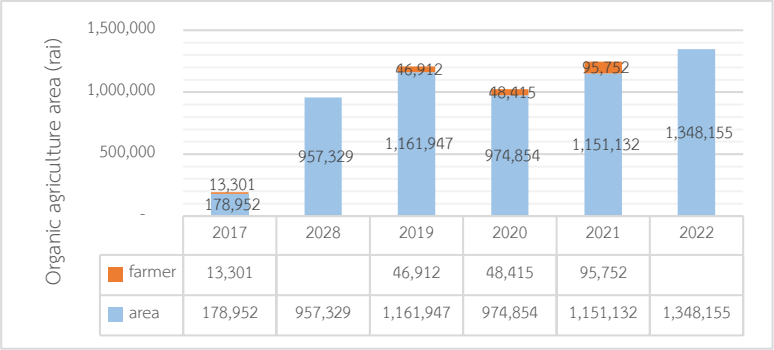


Figure 1 The increment of organic agriculture area in Thailand from 2017-2023

2. Young farmers

In the United States, a young farmer is defined as a farmer with agricultural experience lower than ten years that is younger than 35 years old. The young farmer population is assessed at 14 per cent. A young farmer in the European Union (EU) is defined as a farmer who started farming less than five years ago and is less than 40 years of age (Adamowicz & Szepeluk, 2016).

In Thailand, a recent government survey of Thai farmers shows that all farmers number is 18,204,000, and farmers under Smart Farmers are 1,099,000 and registered to Young-Smart Farmers 13,000 (Figure 2) (Office of the Permanent Secretary for Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives, 2020).

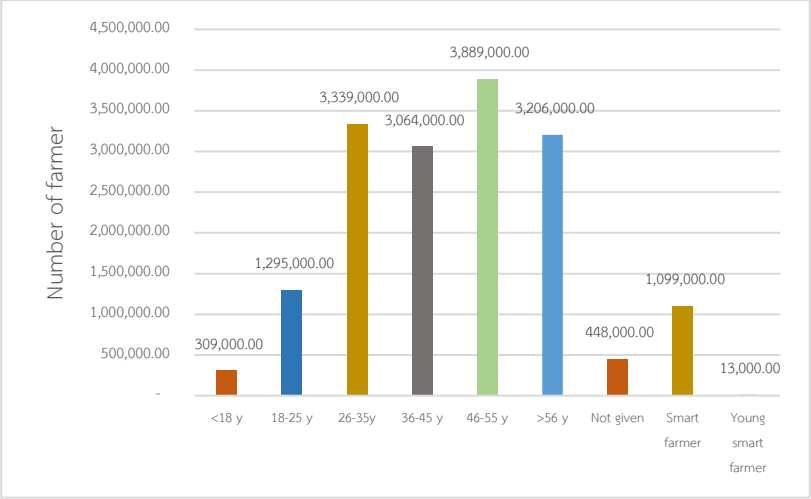


Figure 2 Ages of farmers and smart farmers in Thailand, 2020

Compared to the number of Thai citizens, it can be seen that around 27.58 per cent are farmers because young people are more interested in working in the industrial and service sectors in the cities than in agriculture. Factors that influence them to work in the city are negative attitudes toward agriculture, poverty and the high cost of production with low returns (Prachathai, 2020; Tapanapunnitikul & Prasunpangsri, 2014). Moreover, parents discourage their children from returning to farm work (Borisutdhi & Kaewkhata, 2015a, 2015b, 2015c; Phiboon & Faysse, 2019). In practice, young people often do not have the power to negotiate with the parents to run farm activities because the land does not yet belong to them, and the negative attitude of society is that working on the farm is hard, dirty, and not a great job (Rayasawath, 2018). These reasons convince young people to leave the agricultural sector to find jobs in the cities for a higher salary (Supantee & Suwanrarin, 2016). The career they most want to have is a government officer (Šimpachová Pechrová et al., 2018). Even the Thai government initiated several projects supporting young people to develop their farms, especially

the Young Smart Farmer Project (YSF), which aims to develop a new farmer generation and create incentives for new farmers by applying local knowledge from ancestors and new technology/innovation to improve production and marketing (Poungchompu & Phuttachat, 2023). However, the number of young farmers is still slightly increased compared to the number of Thai farmers. It might be because of different reasons young people decide to return home, for instance, the limitation of farmland, financial capital, lack of agricultural knowledge, social acceptance, and other reasons.

3. Farm Management and Defining Farm Success

In the past, farm management focused on business. The success of farm management was in seeking the lowest investment and obtaining the highest profit. Nowadays, farm management focuses on systematic and holistic management, which includes environmental and economic aspects. Farmers need to invest time and finances in the farm. However, they also need to set up a good management model associated with holistic management that considers the relationship among physical, biological, economic, and societal relationships (Mungmuang & Waraeaksiri, 2017; Pinthukas, 2012), and they are expected to adapt knowledge and technology to succeed in farm management (Sørensen et al., 2010).

Success in organic farming has not been clearly defined in the past. It can refer to a successful process whereby farmers obtain knowledge and skills, critical thinking, and farm management skills and are able to transfer knowledge to new farmers and others (Errington, 2002). The previous studies In Thailand have identified agricultural knowledge, positive attitude toward organic farming, and social relations as key factors in measuring organic agriculture success (Lukrak & Athinuwat, 2013; Maneeshote & Athinuwat, 2019). In addition, family

support is also considered essential for young farmers to achieve the success goal of organic farm management (Chinvarasopak, 2015).

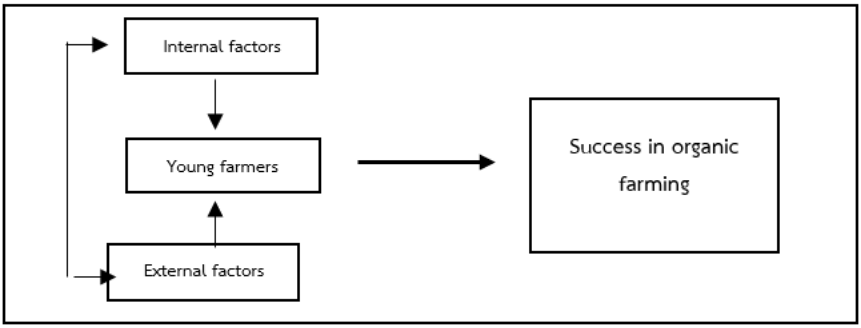


Figure 3 Conceptual Framework (Internal and external factors that influence young farmers to succeed in organic farming)

Methodology

Qualitative research was proposed in 10 provinces in upper northeastern Thailand: Loei, Mukdahan, Sakhon Nakhon, Nong Khai, Bueng Kan, Udon Thani, Khonkaen, Nakhon Phanom, Nongbua Lamphu, and Kalasin provinces. The researchers sent official letters to agricultural extension offices in the ten upper northeastern provinces to identify young organic farmers below 45 years old who hold organic agriculture knowledge and have had good organic farm management for at least 3 years. Simple random sampling techniques were performed to narrow the provinces from 10 to 5 (Loei, Nongkhai, Nongbua Lamhpu, Khonkaen, and Kalasin) from which to select farmers for interviews. Finally, 20 farmers were simply randomised (4 from each province). Meanwhile, the researchers submitted human ethics for this study to the Maejo University Institutional Review Board for approval (ST003/66).

A total of 18 young farmers identified by Agriculture Extension Officers were available for interviews (12 male and 6 female) with various farm activities, for instance, vegetable farming, rice farming, livestock, and integrated farming. Semi-structured face-to-face in-depth interviews were

applied to gather information (Henn et al., 2006). The interviews covered three topics: background of the young farmers; challenges and key factors influencing organic farm success; and definitions of success in Organic farming. Moreover, participation observation (Henn et al., 2006) was also applied on farms and at young farmers' meetings. Given that the total number of young organic farmers in the selected five provinces was limited, a total of 18 interviewees is considered a reasonable sample size for collecting qualitative data.

Thematic analysis (Vaismoradi et al., 2013) was applied to identify and evaluate the key factors for success in organic farming. In this stage, the keywords transcribed from the in-depth interviews and notes of researcher observations from the field and group meetings were analysed and categorised according to three inductive themes: reason for returning home, definitions of organic farming success, and factors influencing organic farming success.

Results

The result was from 18 young farmers (Male 12, Female 6) from 5 provinces (Loei, Nongkhai, Nongbua Lamphu, Khonkaen, and Kalasin). All of them have been practicing organic farming for at least three years and hold agricultural knowledge and expertise. Considering farm type, it was found that most young farmers have integrated farming, such as livestock and plantation. The results were divided into three parts: reasons for returning home, organic success definitions, and success factors, which are explained below.

1. Reasons for Returning Home

The reasons that convince young farmers to return home are the stress from work, which caused their health issues. The other reason is that

they want to return home to take care of family members, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. Many respondents used to work in big cities, factories, and companies for many years, spending much time on their work to earn money while facing mental and health problems.

> "I finished work at 5–6 p.m., but some days, my supervisor called/texted me at night (8–9 p.m.) to assign some work. I questioned why I had to work even at night because it was my private time. I shouldn't work, and how long should I work like this? During my employment, I had high blood pressure. (Young farmer in Loei province, October 12, 2022).

Returning home is considered a primary option to recover from health issues and produce food for family consumption.

In addition, income generation was another reason to return home, especially for those who want to start a farm business. Despite a good business plan, they may face unforeseeable challenges for which they need to find solutions. Farming is a hard job; farmers have to work in the sun and may gain unstable income and confront the risk of unpredictable weather.

In summary, the reasons for young people returning home to start an organic farm can be classified into two normative groups. The first group refers to a social norm, expressing a wish to live closer to their family members, while the second refers to a market norm, expressing an aim to initiate agribusiness.

2. Organic Farming Success Definitions

Based on the definitions put forward by our respondents, we have identified seven dimensions of organic farm success as follows;

2.1 Income success: Among the young farmers surveyed, primary income comes from different sources, such as selling organic products, facilitating farm activities, and farm services (farm stay, restaurant, coffee shop). The average monthly income between the two normative groups is

different. The average income of those who aim to live with family and have health issues (Social norm) is USD954 monthly (THB33,390), while the income range is USD143–1,858 (THB5,000–65,000). Meanwhile, the other group, young farmers who aim to initiate an agribusiness (Market norm), is USD6,867 monthly (THB204,345), while the income range is USD343-5,600 (THB12,000-196,000).

> "My monthly income is from selling the extracted vegetables and fruit juice. I sell the products at Loei downtown every Friday, Saturday, Sunday, and Monday. So, I can earn money from selling products for 2,000 baht per day, I can get 32,000 baht a month, and the total cost is half of the income. We grow the vegetables and fruits ourselves; it is not a high cost. I can give that money to my children for school". (Young farmer in Loei province, October 12, 2022).

2.2 Safe food and food security success: One of the young farmer's expectations is that converting to organic farming is the right way to recover health and care for the environment, even if the yield is lower than that from conventional farming. The most important thing is that organic foods are safe.

> "Our life is based on food; we have a forest, which means we have food I think I walk on the right way, even though I cannot sell the product, but I have food to eat. On this farm, I have the forest to produce food for the whole year; what I want to eat, I grow them. The food covers family consumption, sharing with village members, making merit, and selling at the market." (Young organic farmer in Nongbualamphu, September 10, 2022).

Young farmers reported that many health problems and symptoms associated with chemical farming have disappeared. They also reported improved "food security". During the two years of the COVID-19 pandemic, when many people faced a food crisis, young farmers did not suffer problems in accessing food.

2.3 Family relation: Northeastern Thai (Isaan) culture gives value to strong kinship relationships. For instance, having meals, farming, caring for family members, and other family activities. These simple livelihoods are fundamental to the lives that the young farmers wish to have after working in the city for a long time. After beginning organic farming and when the farms were advanced and constant, their parents better understood organic farming practices. In some families, parents helped on the farm. These phenomena can prove to their parents that organic farming is possible and they can live close to family companions. These organic farming practices are the way they expect to live closely with their families.

> “I asked my father to use a piece of his land for organic farming. I challenged him, “If I could pay your debts for you, may I use more of the land?” Eventually, I paid off his debt. After one year, he gave me more land to expand the organic farm.” (Young organic farmer in Kalasin province, December 11 2022).

2.4 Farm development success: Young organic farmers reported that it is crucial to diversify their farms, not only through various plants and animals but also by initiating farm businesses, such as coffee shops, restaurants, organic farming learning centres, etc. It is also another channel to generate income and promote farm activity. After obtaining land from their parents, they usually develop the land to be more functional by adapting new technologies to earn higher yields, creating online channels to promote their farms and market, scaling up the farm to the organic farm learning centre and sharing knowledge to people, and networking with people in the

community in order to build a way to generate income as a group. This kind of participation transition from the old generation to the new generation encourages people in the community to understand more about returning home and the new practice of organic farming.

2.5 Quality of life success: Successful young organic farmers reported being able to manage their farms systematically, having free time to fulfil new agricultural knowledge and techniques, and developing their networks, which is helpful in enhancing their farm activities. Importantly, they also gain acceptance from family and community members. In addition, their health problems have improved, which might be because they live in a good environment, consume safe foods, and live without work pressure.

> "I used many chemicals in farm production, especially pesticides for lemon and lime. When I went to the toilet, I saw blood in my stool, so I stopped using it and changed my mind to organic farming as an alternative way to produce safe food for my family." (Young organic farmer in Leoi province, October 12, 2022).

Moreover, they report having free time for leisure, participating in community activities, and less pressure and stress compared to their previous jobs.

2.6 Agricultural knowledge and knowledge transfer success: Amongst the young farmers interviewed, those who had developed their organic agricultural knowledge and practice scaled up their farms to organic agriculture learning centres, which aim to transfer the organic farming concept, knowledge, and techniques to others to spread the idea of organic farming to different areas.

2.7 Network success: Young farmers highlighted the importance of supporting their community, particularly once their farms were well established and operating smoothly. They invite people in the community to begin practising organic farming, at least for family consumption, and initiate farmer groups. These can be divided into informal (unregistered) groups and formal groups (such as Community enterprises), which can more easily access financial institutions and project support from the government.

3. Factors Influencing Organic Farming Success

The success of other young organic farmers is crucial in influencing new entrants to organic farming. However, many find that operating organic farming is not always smooth, especially at the beginning, and many reported challenges they had to overcome. Nine support factors from this study are significant for them to succeed in organic farming.

3.1 Attitude toward organic farming: This is significant for young farmers. After analysing the data from 18 key informants, the result shows that 30.9 per cent of the answers indicated that a positive attitude is the most crucial compared to the other factors. They strongly believe that organic farming is an alternative way of life compared to their work experience in the city. Through organic farming, they can produce safe food for family consumption and generate income, fulfil agricultural knowledge and skills, share knowledge with people in the community, have groups and networks at different levels, and care for the environment. Therefore, the young farmers have set goals and developed methods for their success.

> "We eat every day, so we do farming; we can produce food that secures our lives. Having money does not mean we can buy whatever we want. I think I am on the right way. Even though I cannot sell the product, I have food. So, on my farm, I grow what I eat. I grow everything for family consumption, making merit at the temple, sharing for

neighbourhoods, and selling at the market. This is the way I live." (Young organic farmer in Nongbua Lamphu province).

3.2 Family support: In general, many young people are strongly discouraged from farming by their parents, possibly because of their parents' negative attitude towards being a farmer. They want their children to have a brighter future than farming. However, many parents of successful young organic farmers understand the opportunities brought by organic farming and encourage their descendants to be what they want by offering finance, labour, consulting support, etc. This support provides an essential foundation for young farmers, particularly at the beginning stage.

3.3 Farm labour: Young farmers usually initiate organic farms by themselves, sometimes with support from family members. Once the farm operation is stable, production is increased to supply the market. Notably, young farmers need to hire local labourers for organic farm learning centres and business farms because they want to create jobs for people in the community as farm assistants.

3.4 Organic production control: After shifting to organic farming, the most important thing is to continue adhering to organic agriculture principles. Though initiating organic farming may be more complicated and challenging than conventional farming, young farmers are motivated to find solutions to the challenges because they firmly believe that organic products must be safe and clean for people and nature. To control the product quality, they need to follow the principles and the rules of organic agriculture production to build trust with the consumers.

3.5 Economic capital: It is essential to invest in a start-up organic farm. The level of investment depends on the purpose and type of farm, as

well as the farmer's personal goals. However, financial capital is vital for every farmer in terms of farm setting and circulating funds.

3.6. Organic farming knowledge: It is essential for young farmers to be aware of organic agriculture before returning home. Even though some young farmers have few skills and knowledge of organic farming during the first initiation, some prior knowledge is vital. The knowledge can help young farmers deal with problems and challenges and can also help enhance their farms.

> "The government officers provided agricultural knowledge to us because we wanted to do organic farming. Especially at the beginning of farming, we did not know how to farm following organic principles and how to use bio-fertilisers, bio-extract, etc. We obtained all knowledge by attending the workshops," (Young organic farmer in Kalasin province, November 11, 2022).

3.7 Group and network: Young farmers usually do not farm in an individualistic way; they try to share their lessons with the community. Groups often originate amongst a small number of organic farms and are extended gradually. Nonetheless, group expansion is challenging, especially with organic ideology and methods. Establishing a group enables the development of group identity and acceptance at the community level; group membership also helps individual farmers overcome obstacles and gain access to markets and funding sources.

3.8 Marketing strategy: Marketing strategies help young farmers achieve their market aim and sustain their organic farms. This can help the farmers retain regular customers. In addition, having a systematic market strategy can help young farmers generate income. Some farmers can earn higher incomes than in their previous jobs, especially those with clear goals and savings that can be invested in the farm.

3.9 Social media: Social media provides influential online platforms where young organic farmers can access and share information and knowledge. Many young people use Facebook and YouTube to present their farm activities and sell products. Some Facebook pages of young farmers have more than ten thousand followers, which is helpful and tends to increase the numbers of their followers, consumers, and income. Farm stories can also influence content creators to develop stories on different dimensions of farming. Engaging in social media also helps maintain group and network connections. Social media platforms are the primary channels for group members to communicate and exchange knowledge and expertise.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, social media played a critical role in helping young farmers update each other about the pandemic, maintain group and network connections, and encourage consumers to buy the products. Facebook, Line, and YouTube were the most effective platforms. These also provided a robust market space and a major advertising platform that they were able to use to promote their products.

> "Formerly, I sold my farm products at the local Long Lei market, but during the COVID-19 pandemic period, I adapted to selling the products through the online platform. Initially, the customers did not know my Facebook page. Two months later, the page became well-known to consumers. I sold the products via Facebook; I did not purchase them for any advertisement fee. I only posted through the Meaung Lei delivery Facebook group, which helped increase income generation. For example, consumers usually go to the Lor Lei market; however, if I sell my products through social media, mainly Facebook. The customers will contact me by making a

call to pre-order the products, and for the other twenty per cent that is left, I bring them to sell at the Lor Lei market." Said the young organic farmer, Lei province, August 12, 2023).

Even though there is support from the government for the young farmers, it is not a significant factor compared to the 9 factors. Due to all key informants are not from the government's support project; however, those from the government project have received different forms of support, such as crop production knowledge, tools, and facilities, technology for food processing, irrigation, and network linkage through the rotated meetings that are organised quarterly. These forms of support are partially for assisting the young farmers to operate their farms.

On the other hand, some of the key informants reflected that supporting from the government, farmers could not receive the full budget as planned, which had a negative effect on their farm operations. In addition, the non-supported farmers reflected that some of the government's conditions are barriers to farm operation, particularly registration regulation, which can be a limitation instead of an opportunity for farm development.

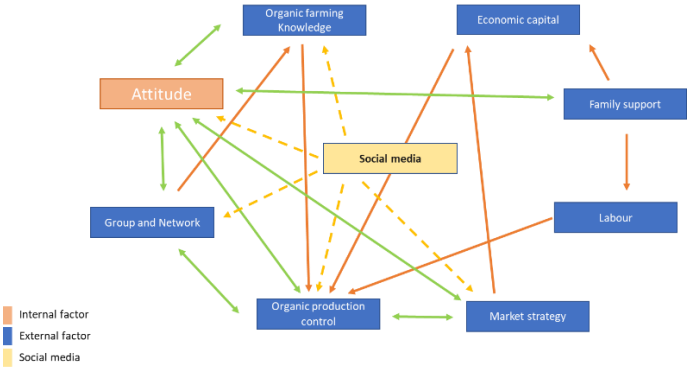


Figure 4 The relationships among key factors

Discussion

The result indicated that working under pressure, the national economic crisis, and social dilemmas affected their self-values. Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic was another crisis, and many people were confronted with difficulties living in the cities. Due to the situation convinced young people to return home. It is consistent with the study on the young generation in Northeastern Thailand, revealing that the main reason young people return home is working under pressure (Somyanontanakul et al., 2023). In the meantime, organic agriculture is an attractive trend for young people; it is also an alternative option that is possible. Before returning home, they plan how to start farming, such as searching for organic agricultural knowledge and marketing strategy. These are significant for those who are returning home to initiate organic farming.

However, after returning home, some young farmers started conventional farming using chemical inputs to gain high yields and income because they were agribusiness-oriented. In this kind of farming, they need high investment, particularly at the initiation. However, agribusiness is not as smooth as expected due to the high farm investment and health issues, which changed their mindset to organic agriculture. At the same time, the other group of young farmers firmly intend to start with organic farming because they have collected agricultural knowledge, good practices, and trust that organic farming can be an occupation that earns sufficient income. However, they need to find the differences between conventional and organic farming, for instance, selling techniques by value-added in the product, farm stories, open farm to the organic farming learning centre and relaxing space, networking with people in the community, and adopting social media to publicise farm to broader people. It can be seen that young farmers have

changed their mindset and practice to fulfill the monthly income gap after leaving their jobs. It is associated with the previous study about the transition approach, which reveals 3 critical points of transition: perspective, strategic planning, and management (Lachman, 2013), reaffirming that young farmers initiated from a positive mindset to practice.

Meanwhile, they can manage their own income when they become organic farmers. It is consistent with the study in Khon Kaen province, which found that the mindset of farmers is always dynamic following the social context, for example, the change from chemical to organic farming due to health issues and environmental conditions (Somkaun et al., 2021). This change is not only earning higher income for themselves but also helping people in the community generate extra income. Moreover, they also adopted technology and innovation to scale up their farms, particularly the online market. This phenomenon of change among young farmers can be analysed and illustrates that people are aware of caring for nature and the environment, not only in Thailand but also in Ireland, which reveals that organic farming is a pathway to protecting the environment (Läpple & Rensburg, 2011). In China, the Chinese perspective also values organic food production from the concept of caring and sharing between people and nature; even though organic products are slightly higher than in general, they are willing to buy them (Sirieix et al., 2011). Regarding the trend of organic consumption, in which people are more aware of the environment worldwide, it is an opportunity for young farmers to add value to their products and sell them at a higher price.

In the transition from ordinary employees to self-employed, they are confronted with daily challenges and need solutions to deal with them. Many found a more precise pathway to enhance farm activity and combine physical and digital markets. As a result, 18 young farmers can be called successful farmers. However, the word “successful” might be questioned in this study.

This indicates that each young farmer's definition of organic farming success may differ. Thus, the researcher has summarised the success into seven dimensions. The highest value dimensions are sufficient income and safe food for consumption. It relates to the study in the UK, Canada, USA, and Australia, indicating that a farmer's success is associated with production, family support, and community participation. The association of these components is crucial to developing a community (Lobley et al., 2010). Likewise, It conforms to this study that young farmers' success must be part of supporting the community. From this point of view, the young farmers have formed a group in their communities and joined the network at different levels to find appropriate pathways to operate their farms and benefit all group members significantly in terms of income.

Even though the study indicates that the success of young farmers consists of 7 dimensions, it does not mean that all 18 key informants reached all the dimensions; it depends on their contexts. The study found that one significant dimension is income generation, which can be measured and accepted by people in the community. Most young farmers are in this stage, and they are developing their farms in order to achieve sufficient income. Another success dimension is organic farm knowledge and development. However, they are struggling with knowledge transfer due to the unacceptance of people in the community who are not open-minded about organic farming. It is a challenge for young farmers to deal with. The remaining 4 success dimensions, including food security, family relationships, quality of life, and network, would be powerful drivers driving young farmers to achieve all the 7 dimensions of organic farming success.

While the study in Indonesia indicated that the success of farming includes nineteen dimensions, those dimensions can be categorised into well-

being, social participation, and environmental awareness (Winaya et al., 2021), which means they are satisfied with their activities and income, are part of the community development and environmental protection, which is relevant to the Sri Sa Ket province study, that farming is not only income-earning but also includes happiness (Borisutdhi & Kaewkhata, 2015a).

Considering income, the previous study indicates that young farmers expected their monthly income from general farming to be USD882.3 (THB30,870) (Phonsukkarn & Jintanasirinurak, 2021). In comparison, the young farmers in this study can generate USD954 (THB33,390) on average, reaffirming that they can generate higher income through organic farming than general farming expectations. This is an exceptional initiation and motivation for young farmers to scale up their farming.

It can be seen that different factors found in this study are the key-driven factors that are the main objective of this study, which led young farmers to succeed and influenced them to continue organic farming. This study found that a positive attitude toward organic farming (internal factor) is significant to young farmers, particularly before returning home and initiating farming, which is relevant to the study in Lamphun province that a positive attitude toward farming occupation is highly significant, especially when farmers gain support on knowledge and farming techniques from government institutions and participation in the training so that they can apply to their farms (Jeerat et al., 2019). Surprisingly, in this study, some young farmers ignored the government's support because some support cannot address the problem, it also creates difficulties, and most support is intermittent. Thus, they believe that to develop and scale up organic farming, a precise strategic plan must be developed through co-designing among groups in the community.

Eventually, a positive attitude (internal) is fundamental to operating organic farms in the first initiation. Furthermore, other factors (external) found

in this study are essential to fulfil and enhance their farms. The first four significant factors are prioritised for discussion, including a positive attitude toward organic farming, organic farming knowledge, support from family, and financial capital, respectively. As mentioned earlier, a positive attitude is crucial for young farmers to succeed. Moreover, organic agricultural knowledge is essential to support young farmers in developing their farms and products, especially for those with limited farming knowledge at the beginning. Conforming to the farmer group in Cha Choeng Sao province, they also prioritise knowledge as a crucial component for farmers to develop their farms (Tangtung & Nurittamont, 2019). In addition, support from family is another factor that plays a crucial role in supporting young farmers in different dimensions, which conforms to the Sri Sa Ket province study revealing that family is vital in supporting young farmers, especially encouragement, finance, and labour support (Borisutdhi & Kaewkhata, 2015b). These supporting factors are significant in helping young farmers achieve their organic farming goals.

Significantly, this study also found that social media is a crucial factor, mainly empowering young farmers to access agricultural knowledge, communicate with people, maintain connections among groups and networks, and sell products. It is also a proper tool to spread farm activity through various multimedia, which can reach more followers. Not only farmers in Thailand but also in other countries always use social media to promote their farms and search for knowledge and training programs (Joshi & Dhaliwal, 2019). Studies from Thailand and other countries show that farmers and consumers worldwide can easily access information through internet platforms, particularly since the COVID-19 crisis, and has impacted the present. Finally, social media is a powerful platform in the digitalization era.

It is important for young farmers to up skills, mainly in organic farming knowledge, connecting with people, and competing on the online market.

Conclusion

This study indicates that the definition of success in organic farming can be divided into 7 dimensions. Nine factors are crucial in this study to succeed in organic farming, including internal factor that mainly focuses on a positive attitude toward organic farming and external factors, including family support, farm labour, product quality control, marketing strategy, financial capital, organic farming knowledge, and networking.

Significantly, a positive attitude toward organic farming is one of the nine factors that is the first priority of young farmers. However, when they start farming, additional factors are also essential. Even though the study indicates that the 9 factors are essential to support young farmers in successful organic farming, on the other hand, these factors can also be challenges. Therefore, non-governmental and governmental organisations are key actors that work closely with young farmers, and they should revise relevant policies appropriately to meet the needs of young farmers—mainly by providing organic farming knowledge/techniques and proper channel access to financial institutions.

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