

EXPLORING MERCHANT PREFERENCES IN DECISIONS TO PURCHASE PINEAPPLES FROM FARMERS IN SENURO VILLAGE

**Muhammad Andri Zuliansyah^{1*}, Reshi Wahyuni², Serly Novita Sari³,
Adli⁴, M. Huanza⁵, Jerry Antonio⁶**

1,2,3,4,5,6 Sriwijaya University, Sumatera Selatan, Indonesia

E-mail: mzuliansyah@fp.unsri.ac.id^{1*}, reshiwahyuni@fp.unsri.ac.id², serly110989@fp.unsri.ac.id³,
adli@fp.unsri.ac.id⁴, m_huanza@fp.unsri.ac.id⁵, jerryantonio@fp.unsri.ac.id⁶

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Abstract

This study was motivated by the importance of exploring traders' preferences in purchasing pineapples from farmers as an effort to strengthen the marketing chain and increase the competitiveness of local pineapple products in Senuro Village. The purpose of this study was to identify the factors that influence traders' decisions in purchasing pineapples in Senuro Village, Tanjung Batu District, Ogan Ilir Regency. This study used a survey method with a descriptive approach, involving four traders as samplings who were selected purposively. Data were collected through structured interviews using questionnaires, then analyzed descriptively and qualitatively to interpret patterns of trader preferences. The results showed five main factors that influence traders' decisions, namely quality, supply continuity, price, trust and relationships, and marketing risk. Quality is the most dominant factor because it is directly related to the fruit grading system, selling value, and market acceptance. Supply continuity is also important to maintain business stability, especially for traders who supply to markets outside the region. Price plays a secondary role after quality is met. In addition, trust between farmers and traders and the ability to manage marketing risks also influence the sustainability or strengthening of cooperative relationships.

Keywords: *Merchant preferences; pineapple; quality; marketing; senuro village*

INTRODUCTION

Pineapple is one of the important horticultural commodities in Indonesia because it contributes to farmers' income and supports the development of local agriculture. Pineapple production in Indonesia continues to increase, driven by stable industrial and local market demand (Mahendra, et al., 2024). Data of (BPS, 2024) shows that in 2022, pineapple production reached 3.2 million tons, an increase of around 10.99% compared to 2021, which amounted to 2.8 million tons. The latest data for 2023 shows a slight decrease to 3.16 million tons, but this figure still indicates a high level of production compared to previous years. In addition, the integration of pineapple into the national agribusiness system shows that this commodity not only plays a role as a source of household consumption but also as a high-value economic commodity (Aini, et al., 2023). The role of pineapples in increasing farmers' income has been widely identified in various marketing studies in production centers such as Lampung and South Sumatra (Yunita et al., 2024; Zulfikar et al., 2019). Meanwhile, research by (Zuliansyah et al., 2024) confirms that pineapple is the main source of income for most farmers, with a fairly active marketing pattern that is directly connected to the local market.

Pineapple marketing chain usually involves several intermediaries, such as collectors, wholesalers, and retailers, who help push the product from the farm to the consumer. Research on marketing in Pangkul Village shows that there are at least three main pineapple marketing channels, indicating the level of complexity in the distribution of this commodity (Mahendra et al., 2024). The role of intermediaries is very important in the process of transporting, sorting, and storing pineapples before they reach the market (Ramadhani et al., 2023). This multi-level marketing channel structure also affects prices for farmers and end consumers (Aini et al., 2023; Taufik et al., 2021). The length of the marketing channel affects the level of marketing efficiency and the size of the margin earned by farmers. The longer the marketing channel, the lower the share received by farmers, as shown in research on pineapple marketing in Sungai Raya (Aini et al., 2023). Another study conducted in Central Lampung shows that the more intermediaries

in the marketing channel, the higher the marketing margin, but farmers' income actually decreases (Zulfikar et al., 2019). The ability of traders to carry out logistics and management functions efficiently also affects marketing efficiency (Ramadhani et al., 2023; Taufik et al., 2021). In fact, research on pineapple farming in Senuro village shows that the marketing structure affects farmers' income levels and bargaining power (Afifuddin et al., 2023). Traders' decisions to purchase pineapples from farmers are greatly influenced by the quality or grade of the fruit, continuity or certainty of supply, and the level of profit that can be obtained. Research in Punggur District shows that traders prefer grade A because it provides higher profits (Zulfikar et al., 2019). In addition to quality, traders also pay attention to consistency in delivery as a way to maintain relationships with end buyers or consumers (Mahendra et al., 2024). Furthermore, a study on pineapple marketing in Senuro Village by (Zuliansyah et al., 2024) found that fruit characteristics, harvest time, and farmers' sales methods influence traders' decisions in choosing suppliers. Other studies also show that farmers who have good quality and continuous supply are more preferred by traders (Yunita et al., 2024).

Pineapple marketing often faces price fluctuations, capital constraints, and information gaps between farmers and traders. Farmers tend to rely on collectors when market access is limited or funds are insufficient (Ramadhani et al., 2023). Research in various regions shows that large traders often buy in bulk, leaving small traders and farmers with less bargaining power (Taufik et al., 2021). Research on pineapple farming in Senuro Village by (Afifuddin et al., 2023) shows that production costs and marketing methods affect farmers' incomes, making farmers more vulnerable to price imbalances. This is in line with the findings of (Zuliansyah et al., 2024), who stated that pineapple farmers in Senuro Village still face marketing obstacles, even though farmers actively sell pineapples. Many studies have discussed various aspects of pineapple marketing, such as the structure of its distribution channels (Mahendra et al., 2024), marketing efficiency depending on channel length (Aini et al., 2023), and profit margins at each level of trade (Zulfikar et al., 2019). but there are still very few studies that specifically discuss traders' preferences in selecting pineapples from farmers. Previous studies have focused more on channel analysis, margins, and efficiency, without delving deeper into how traders select suppliers based on quality, supply continuity, social relationships, and marketing risks. However, research by (Zuliansyah et al., 2024) shows that farmer characteristics and sales patterns influence marketing behavior, although this has not been explored in depth in terms of trader purchasing preferences. Therefore, this study aims to gain a deeper understanding of trader preferences in deciding to purchase pineapples directly from farmers in Senuro Village.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Merchants' preferences in purchasing horticultural commodities, including pineapples, are influenced by various interrelated factors in the marketing chain. Product quality is the most dominant factor according to various studies stating that traders pay close attention to aspects of uniformity in size, color, ripeness, and physical condition of the fruit, because visual quality is the main determinant of consumer appeal (Sari & Pratama, 2021). The grading or quality classification system has also been proven to influence price structure and marketing margins (Putra & Suryana, 2020; Susilawati et al., 2021). In addition to quality, supply continuity is an important variable in maintaining the relationship between farmers and traders. (Mulyani & Nugroho, 2021) state that supply stability determines the sustainability of cooperation, especially for large traders who serve market demand on a regular basis. (Prabowo, 2022) adds that staggered planting helps maintain supply throughout the year, thereby minimizing production fluctuations.

Price is also a factor in purchasing decisions, but various studies show that traders prioritize quality over low prices. (Hidayat & Fadhillah, 2021) found that traders are willing to pay higher prices for products with stable quality in order to reduce the risk of damage. This is consistent with the findings of (Wijayanti & Yusuf, 2022) that price is a secondary consideration after quality is met. In addition to technical aspects, trust and social relationships between farmers and traders play an important role in strengthening the supply chain. According to (Rahmawati & Putra, 2023; Sutanto & Firmansyah, 2020), long-term relationships built through honesty, consistent quality, and open communication can reduce transaction costs and increase loyalty. Finally, various studies emphasize the importance of understanding marketing risks, such as price fluctuations, demand uncertainty, and information asymmetry in transactions. According to (Mahendra & Yusuf, 2020; Sari & Utomo, 2021), marketing risks often burden farmers, especially when fruit quality does not meet standards or supply is unstable. Risk management through quality standards and market diversification is key to creating a more efficient marketing chain.

METHOD

This research was conducted in Senuro Village, Tanjung Batu Subdistrict, Ogan Ilir Regency. The location was deliberately chosen because Senuro Village is one of the villages that produces pineapples in Ogan Ilir Regency. The method used in this study was a survey. The sampling technique used was purposive sampling (Sugiyono, 2019). Considering the number of traders who directly purchase pineapples from farmers, all samples taken were 4 traders. Data analysis was carried out using a descriptive qualitative approach to gain a deeper understanding of traders' preferences in purchasing pineapples directly from farmers. The qualitative approach was chosen because this study aimed to understand the experiences, perceptions, and considerations of traders in local marketing (Creswell, 2016). This method is able to provide a more complete picture of marketing dynamics, which cannot be measured by numbers (Moleong, 2018; Sugiyono, 2019).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Traders tend to prioritize criteria that have a direct impact on operational sustainability and consumer or customer satisfaction, where fruit quality is the most important factor because it determines selling value, consumer preferences, and the risk of shrinkage during distribution (Rahmawati et al., 2020; Sari & Pratama, 2021; Zuliansyah et al., 2024). Attributes such as size, skin color, ripeness, and durability are closely related to the ability of traders to maintain the fruit sold in the market, especially for horticultural commodities such as pineapple, which is easily damaged (Andayani & Putra, 2023; Purnamasari, 2021). In addition, supply continuity is an important consideration because traders need a stable flow of goods to meet daily and seasonal demand. Supply instability can disrupt traders' relationships with end customers, especially when serving modern markets that demand consistency in volume and quality. Therefore, traders prefer suppliers who can provide quality assurance and continuity on an ongoing basis, even when prices are slightly higher (Hidayat et al., 2022). Social relationships and marketing risk factors continue to influence traders' decisions, although they are more of a supporting or long-term strategic consideration. Research shows that good social relationships, including personal closeness, trust, and smooth communication, can create flexibility.

Social relationships and marketing risks continue to influence traders' decisions, although they are more of a supporting or long-term strategic consideration. Research shows that good social relationships, including personal closeness, trust, and smooth communication, can create flexibility in transactions such as deferred payments or special prices (Nugroho & Fauziah, 2020; Zuliansyah et al., 2024). Marketing risk considerations such as price fluctuations, uncertainty of crop quality, and potential damage during shipping also require careful calculation to maintain the sustainability of traders' businesses (Ananda & Putri, 2023; Siregar et al., 2021). In addition, traders choose suppliers who are able to minimize risk through good post-harvest handling, quality assurance, and willingness to renegotiate if market conditions change (Wijayanti & Yusuf, 2022). Although not always a major factor, social relationships and the ability to manage risk still play an important role in building stable and mutually beneficial partnerships between traders and farmers.

Quality (Sorting and Grading)

Fruit quality is a highly prioritized aspect for traders in the pineapple purchasing process in Senuro Village, especially in relation to sorting and grading. Traders prefer fruit with high quality criteria such as uniform size, smooth skin, even yellow color, and a level of ripeness that meets market standards. Physical qualities such as these are considered to increase consumer appeal and minimize the risk of damage during distribution. This is in line with research that states that visual quality and uniformity of size are the main factors in the decision to purchase fresh fruit by traders and consumers (Sari & Pratama, 2021; Zuliansyah et al., 2024). In Senuro Village, some large traders even carry out the sorting and grading process independently after purchasing from farmers' gardens. This is done because not all farmers apply uniform quality standards in harvesting and post-harvest handling activities. The sorting process is carried out to separate pineapples based on size, ripeness, and physical condition, making it easier for traders to determine selling prices in different markets. This is also done for horticultural commodities such as pineapples as an effort by traders to maintain consistent fruit quality before entering the next distribution chain (Rahmawati et al., 2020; Wijayanti & Yusuf, 2022). Some traders in Senuro Village tend to prefer working with farmers who already have basic sorting and grading skills, as this can reduce the traders' workload and improve operational efficiency. Such cooperation often develops informally through long-term relationships based on trust and supply reliability. This condition is in line with research findings that show that traders are more likely to maintain partnerships with suppliers who are able to provide products with consistent quality and meet market standards (Andayani & Putra, 2023; Hidayat et al., 2022). The aspect of quality is not only a technical criterion, but

also influences the dynamics of the relationship between farmers and traders in the pineapple marketing chain in Senuro Village. The pineapple marketing system in Senuro Village generally classifies fruit quality into four grades, namely Grade A, B, C, and D, each of which is distinguished based on size (weight range of 1.0 to 2.5 kg per fruit), uniformity of shape, level of ripeness, and level of fruit defects. Grade A (weight range of 2.5 kg per fruit) is the highest quality category and is most sought after by traders because it has the highest selling value and stable market demand. Grade B (weight range of 2.0 kg per fruit) and C (weight range of 1.5 kg per fruit) are usually marketed to local traders or used for industrial processing, while Grade D (weight range of 1.0 kg per fruit) has the lowest economic value and is often sold in large quantities at low prices. This grading system forms the basis for determining prices and distribution strategies applied by traders. This is in line with research stating that a clear grading system can improve marketing efficiency and affect profit margins at the trader level (Putra & Suryana, 2020; Susilawati et al., 2021; Zuliansyah et al., 2024). The application of these four grades helps traders in Senuro Village adjust their supply to varying market needs while maintaining the stability of the quality of the products being marketed.

Research shows that pineapple quality is the most decisive factor in the purchasing process by traders in Senuro Village, where aspects such as sorting, grading, size uniformity, and physical condition of the fruit form the basis for building economic value and marketing preferences. The application of four quality grades used by traders, ranging from Grade A to D, not only affects the price determination mechanism but also serves as a strategy to adapt to increasingly diverse market demand. Quality consistency has been proven to strengthen the relationship between farmers and traders, increase trust, and reduce the risk of losses in distribution. This supports research stating that quality is a key variable in the horticultural market chain and has a strong influence on margins, product competitiveness, and the sustainability of marketing relationships (Sari & Pratama, 2021; Wijayanti & Yusuf, 2022; Zuliansyah et al., 2024).

Supply Continuity

Supply continuity is one of the crucial factors that traders pay close attention to when determining pineapple suppliers in Senuro Village. Traders emphasize that a stable supply enables them to consistently meet consumer demand, especially during peak periods or seasonal demand. In Senuro Village, some farmers are able to supply pineapples regularly due to staggered planting patterns, but others still depend on specific harvest periods. This situation requires traders to select farmers with more stable production capacity to avoid stock shortages in the market. Supply continuity in Senuro Village is generally achieved not because the fruit bears fruit every month, but because farmers plant in stages (staggered planting) with a rotating planting schedule. Senuro Village can produce pineapple supplies almost throughout the year with a production range of 10 to 35 tons per year with a land area of around 238.52 ha (BPS, 2024). This finding is in line with research stating that supply stability is an important determinant in the formation of long-term relationships between traders and farmers (Mulyani & Nugroho, 2021; Prabowo, 2022). Traders in Senuro Village also mentioned that uncertainty in production due to weather factors, pest attacks, or lack of crop maintenance can affect the smoothness of supply. When production declines, traders must seek alternative suppliers outside the village, which results in increased logistics costs and the risk of inconsistent quality. Therefore, traders tend to remain loyal to farmers who are able to maintain a consistent harvest rhythm and plant continuously through intercropping or shifting cultivation patterns. This study is in line with the finding that supply continuity greatly affects price stability and the sustainability of horticultural product marketing channels (Sutanto et al., 2020; Zuliansyah et al., 2024).

Traders also consider quality consistency in each shipment. Even if supplies are available, fluctuating quality can affect the selling value and customer loyalty of traders, especially large traders who supply outside the region. In Senuro Village, several traders stated that certain farmers were able to maintain quality even though harvest volumes increased, while other farmers experienced a decline in quality during the harvest season. This makes traders more selective in determining their main and backup suppliers to maintain smooth distribution. This study is in line with the finding that supply continuity and quality are two interrelated factors in purchasing decisions for fresh agricultural products (Hidayat & Fadhillah, 2021). Supply continuity has a direct impact on traders' ability to retain customers, including retailers, other wholesalers, and end consumers. For traders in Senuro Village who supply to village and city markets, delays or reductions in supply can cause them to lose customers to competitors with more stable sources of supply. Therefore, traders often communicate intensively with farmers to monitor harvest schedules and farm conditions. This approach supports research showing that good coordination between farmers and traders can improve supply chain efficiency and reduce the risk of production instability (Rahmawati & Putra, 2023). Supply continuity is fundamental to the relationship between traders and farmers in Senuro Village, as production stability determines the smoothness of distribution, selling prices, and customer loyalty. Traders prefer farmers who are able

to maintain consistent pineapple volume and quality throughout the season, thereby minimizing the risk of stock shortages. This study is in line with research showing that a maintained or stable supply is central to the sustainability of the horticultural marketing chain (Susanto et al., 2020; Mulyani & Nugroho, 2021; Rahmawati & Putra, 2023).

Price

Price is an important factor in the purchasing decisions of traders in Senuro Village, but it is not the main consideration compared to quality and continuity of supply. Traders stated that they prefer good quality pineapples even if they have to pay a little more, because the selling price in the market can still cover the price difference. Competitive market conditions make traders focus more on the ability of products to attract consumers rather than just low prices. This study is in line with previous studies showing that price is not the only determining factor in fresh fruit marketing, especially when product quality is a top priority (Mulyani & Nugroho, 2021; Sari & Pratama, 2021). The price of pineapples in Senuro Village is divided based on grade, and there is a clear price difference. Grade A is sold at Rp 8,000, Grade B at Rp 6,000, Grade C at Rp 3,000, and Grade D at only Rp 1,500. This price difference shows that traders pay more attention to fruit quality than price. They stated that buying Grade A or B pineapples, even though they are more expensive, is still more profitable because the risk of damage, complaints, or consumer rejection is smaller than when buying cheaper Grade C or D pineapples. This study is in line with other studies that state that traders often prioritize margin stability over low purchase prices (Hidayat & Fadhillah, 2021; Zuliansyah et al., 2024).

For large traders in Senuro Village who supply to city markets or outside the region, slightly higher prices are actually considered an investment to maintain business continuity. Traders believe that guaranteed quality and continuity of supply help reduce the risk of losses, such as shrinkage due to damaged fruit or end consumer dissatisfaction. Therefore, traders tend to negotiate prices by considering distribution costs, marketing distance, and market demand. This pattern is in line with research findings that horticultural traders are willing to pay a premium price when quality and supply stability factors are met (Prabowo, 2022; Rahmawati & Putra, 2023). Retail traders in Senuro Village who sell pineapples on a smaller scale also show similar tendencies, although they are more sensitive to price fluctuations. Traders state that if the quality of the fruit meets market standards, a slightly higher price is not a problem because consumers will still choose better fruit. However, traders continue to monitor daily price dynamics in the village market to adjust their sales margins. This is in line with research stating that small traders still consider price, but do not ignore quality as a major factor in purchasing decisions (Susanto et al., 2020; Wijayanti & Yusuf, 2022). Price is not a dominant factor in the purchasing decisions of traders in Senuro Village, but rather a secondary consideration after quality and continuity of supply have been met. Traders are willing to pay higher prices if quality and supply stability can be guaranteed, as these conditions provide long-term benefits and maintain customer loyalty. This is supported by various studies that confirm that price is only a supporting variable in horticultural product purchasing decisions, while quality and supply are the core factors in the relationship between farmers and traders (Hidayat et al., 2022; Rahmawati & Putra, 2023; Zuliansyah et al., 2024).

Trust and Relationships

Trust is one of the most important aspects of the relationship between traders and farmers in Senuro Village. Traders say that long-standing relationships (ranging from 10 to 15 years) provide a sense of comfort in transactions, especially in terms of honesty in weighing, fruit condition, and price agreements. Many traders have been working with the same farmers for years because they are confident that the quality is consistent and in accordance with the agreement. This study is in line with other studies that emphasize that trust is an important foundation in the horticultural product trade in rural areas (Sari & Pratama, 2021; Sutanto & Firmansyah, 2020; Zuliansyah et al., 2024). Relationships based on social proximity influence the smoothness of transactions. In Senuro Village, traders and farmers are often involved in informal social relationships such as village activities, family networks, or inter-village relationships. This proximity allows for greater flexibility in transactions, such as deferred payments or price adjustments when the market is down. Other studies confirm that social relationships facilitate the negotiation process and create stability in marketing cooperation (Hidayat et al., 2022; Wijayanti & Yusuf, 2022). Trust also plays a very important role in reducing the risks faced by traders in marketing, such as uncertainty about quality and potential losses due to damaged fruit. Traders in Senuro Village say that they feel more comfortable working with farmers who have a good track record in maintaining crop quality. This trust is built on long experience, consistent quality, and openness in communication. Previous studies have shown that trust can reduce transaction costs and strengthen loyalty between both parties (Mulyani & Nugroho, 2021; Rahmawati & Putra, 2023).

The presence of collectors or middlemen strengthens relationships within the marketing chain. In Senuro Village, several traders obtain pineapples through collectors who already have close relationships with farmers, making the transaction process faster and more efficient. Collectors usually have a good understanding of harvest schedules, fruit conditions, and supply quantities, so traders are more confident in making decisions. Previous studies have shown that middlemen often serve as a bridge in strengthening trust and facilitating communication between players in the supply chain (Prabowo, 2022; Saputra & Yuliani, 2022). Trust and social relationships between traders, farmers, and collectors in Senuro Village play an important role in determining purchasing patterns and the continuation of cooperation. This factor not only affects the smoothness of transactions, but also determines the stability of the supply chain in the long term. This research is in line with studies showing that trust-based relationships are the main mechanism in horticultural marketing, especially in rural areas that are highly dependent on social interactions and the reputation of market participants (Rahmawati & Putra, 2023; Susanto et al., 2020; Zuliansyah et al., 2024).

Marketing Risk

Marketing risk is an important issue for farmers in Senuro Village because market conditions often change and are greatly influenced by trader preferences. One of the main risks is sudden price fluctuations, especially when supply is abundant. Many farmers admit to receiving lower prices than expected due to limited bargaining power and dependence on certain traders. This phenomenon is consistent with findings that horticultural farmers often face high price risks due to unstable markets and marketing structures that are still controlled by middlemen (Pranata, 2022; Wijaya & Hartati, 2020). Uncertainty regarding demand is also a challenge for farmers. Traders usually only buy fruit that meets certain quality standards, especially Grade A and B, so farmers who fail to meet these standards often have difficulty marketing their crops. In Senuro Village, farmers who do not sort or grade their produce properly often have to sell their fruit at much lower prices. This situation is in line with research showing that quality mismatches are one of the biggest triggers of fruit commodity marketing risks (Riyanto, 2023; Sari & Utomo, 2021).

Traders in Senuro Village want a stable supply to reduce risks related to supply continuity, but weather conditions, pest attacks, or varying harvest patterns often cause inconsistent supplies. When supplies decline, traders tend to switch to other farmers to meet market demand, causing farmers to lose sales opportunities. Previous studies have stated that supply instability has a direct impact on the risk of losing marketing networks and weakening farmers' bargaining position (Mahendra & Yusuf, 2020). In Senuro Village, several farmers complained about the lack of transparency in weighing or price reductions by unscrupulous collectors. This causes transaction risks to arise in the relationship of trust between farmers, collectors, and traders. Conditions like this increase the risk of loss for farmers, especially those who do not have alternative marketing channels. This research is in line with studies that explain that low transaction transparency can increase the risk of information asymmetry and harm farmers (Darmawan, 2023; Hidayat & Fikri, 2021). The marketing risks faced by farmers in Senuro Village arise from a combination of price fluctuations, demand uncertainty, unstable supply continuity, and transaction relationships that are not yet fully transparent. These risks are further exacerbated by farmers' dependence on certain traders, which keeps their bargaining position weak. This is reinforced by research emphasizing the importance of strengthening farmers' capacity, implementing quality standards, and diversifying marketing channels as strategies to minimize risks in the horticultural supply chain (Hidayat & Fikri, 2021; Mahendra & Yusuf, 2020; Sari & Utomo, 2021).

CONCLUSION

Traders' decisions to purchase pineapples from farmers in Senuro Village are influenced by five main factors, namely fruit quality, supply continuity, price, trust, and marketing risk. Among these five factors, quality is the most dominant determinant because it is directly related to the grading system, selling value, and consumer preferences. Supply continuity is also very important for traders to maintain business stability, while price is only a secondary factor as long as quality and supply are met. The relationship of trust and the ability of farmers to minimize marketing risks also strengthen mutually beneficial partnerships.

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