

THE YOUTH PROBLEM IN AGRI-FISHERY EDUCATION

by:

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Let's be honest—when most young people think about their future careers, farming and fishing aren't exactly the first things that come to mind. In a country where young minds are raised to pursue professional careers inside big offices, the idea of working under the sun in fields or out at sea doesn't seem as exciting as being a lawyer, doctor, engineer, or business owner. That's the challenge we're facing when it comes to getting more youth interested in Agri-Fishery-related TLE competencies.

However, here's the thing—without agriculture and fisheries, there's no food on the table. The Philippines, like many other countries in this age, is faced with the threat of food insecurity. Part of the reason would be the exponential increase in population and, subsequently, food demand. This problem is amplified by the decreasing hands in the agri-fishery sector. Less young people are entering the agri-fishery workforce. In fact, the average age of farmers and fisher folk in the country is between 57 and 59 years old (Asis, 2020).

So, why is it so hard to get young people involved in this essential industry? And more importantly, what can we do about it?

A major issue regarding this topic is the outdated perception of agriculture and fisheries. Many students see it as a low-income, labor-intensive field with little room for growth (Secretario, 2021). They associate it with traditional farmers who spend long hours under the sun, physically laboring with dirt all over their body.

What they don't see is the modern side of agri-fishery. They don't see the technology, the business opportunities, or the innovations that are changing the game. The country's agri-fishery sector has seen remarkable growth in recent years. Mechanized farming, aquaponics, hydroponics, precision agriculture, and sustainable fisheries are all revolutionizing the industry, but these advancements aren't always highlighted in schools. If students were more aware of these advancements and innovations in the field, chances are that they would be more interested.

Another challenge that exacerbates this issue is the lack of exposure and opportunities provided to the youth to partake in agri-fishery activities. Let's face it—most schools barely touch on agri-fishery topics unless students are in specialized tracks. And even then, many schools lack the facilities to give students real hands-on experience. Without proper exposure, students won't develop interest. How can they be passionate about something they've never actually tried? If students don't get the chance to plant crops, raise fish, or operate modern farm equipment, how will they ever see its potential?

Aside from this, many parents also push their children towards careers they believe are more "stable" or "prestigious". They want their kids to be doctors, engineers, or IT professionals because they see those careers as more financially rewarding. Agri-fishery is often seen as a "last resort" rather than a first choice. And since students usually take cues from their families, they don't even consider it an option. The problem isn't that agri-fishery can't provide a good living—it can. The problem is that most people don't know it.

So, what can we do to make agri-fishery more appealing to the youth? First, we need to change the way it's taught. Instead of making it just another school subject, we need to make it exciting, modern, and interactive. Schools should incorporate the latest agricultural and fishing technologies into their lessons. Show students how drones are used for farming, how climate-smart agriculture works, and how sustainable fish farming

can be a profitable business. Make them see that this field isn't stuck in the past—it's evolving.

Partnerships with local farmers and fishers can also help. Bringing in guest speakers or mentors who have found success in the industry can inspire students. If they see young entrepreneurs making a living through agribusiness or aquaculture, they'll start to believe it's possible for them too. Success stories matter. They change perspectives.

Lastly, we need to highlight the business side of agri-fishery. Many young people dream of owning their own businesses, but they don't realize that farming and fishing offer huge opportunities for entrepreneurship. Whether it's starting an organic farm, running a fish hatchery, or selling value-added products, the potential for profit is there. If we frame it as a business opportunity rather than just manual labor, more students might take an interest.

Attracting youth to agri-fishery-related TLE competencies isn't impossible, but it requires effort. We have to shift perceptions, provide real experiences, and show them the opportunities that exist beyond the stereotypes. The future of food production is in their hands. If we don't act now, who will feed the next generation? It's time to make them see that agriculture and fisheries aren't just careers—they're the foundation of survival.

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