Farming occupation in the views of farmer families in rural area

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Abstract. As main actors in food production system, farmers receive much of the world’s attention due to the food crisis phenomenon happening all over the world. However, the attention to small-scale farmers tends to be neglected, especially regarding to the crisis of farmer regeneration. Thus it is interesting to understand how small-scale farmers and their families think of farming occupations. To comprehend the meanings underlying the farmer families' views on farming occupations, the researchers applied Herbert Blumer’s symbolic interactionism in descriptive qualitative study using paradigm construction. The data were collected by interviews with a number of farmers and their families in Tegalmade Village, Mojolaban District, Sukoharjo Regency. The results showed that there are different views among older generation (farmers) and younger generation (farmers’ children). The identified views were positive, neutral and negative. The differences in their views are caused by different interaction processes, leading to different action orientations. The young generation has positive views when interacting with their families and youth community engaged in agriculture especially in agriculture entrepreneurship. These positive views result in action orientations to work on the farming occupations. The older generation has positive views when interacting with fellow farmers, views that they want to continue to make farming as their main livelihood.

1. Background

Farmers, as the main actors in providing food for the community, have received great attention from the world, especially by the United Nations amid the food crisis. The UN acknowledgment could be seen at The World Food Day on October 16, 2012 on the topic "Small-Scale Farmers as A Key to Feeding the World", as well as on the publication of the United Nations’ paper entitled "Small Farmers Feed the World". The United Nations has also drafted a Declaration on the Rights of Farmers in Human Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas as a constructive effort to address the problems of food crisis, poverty and rural marginalization [1].

The world’s attention to farmer existence does not stop at the UN declaration. Many countries in the world have been conducting researches on the interests in the agricultural sector to formulate strategies to attract their people, especially the younger generations, to pursue agriculture in the context of farmer regeneration. Indications of the abandonment of agricultural sector by the younger
generation have become common phenomena experienced by many countries in the world. Ben White tried to trace the indications that occurred in several countries such as Mali, Ethiopia, Egypt, India and Africa, found that there are indications of young people avoiding agriculture-based occupations and even sometimes choosing to be unemployed or underemployed rather than returning to rural areas [2]. Another research in Nigeria found that although Agricultural Science was one of the core subjects in the secondary school curriculum in the state of Kogi in Nigeria, his study on 600 youths from 12 secondary schools found that the youths generally have negative attitudes toward agriculture as a future occupation [3]. Other phenomenon on the youth’s disinterest to stay in the rural areas and pursue farming occupations is caused by the view that farming occupations are not prestigious and farmers are not considered as successful people in their community [4]. Several studies that have been conducted in several countries show that the main problem in farmer regeneration is the negative view of the youths on the farming occupation. Thus it is very interesting to study on how the farmer families, in this case the farmers themselves and their children as the next generation, perceive and construct meanings regarding to farming occupations. This study seeks to apply Herbert Blumer's symbolic interactionism approach to identify the views and meanings of the farmers and their families towards farming occupations. In Herbert Blumer's symbolic interactionism, individuals construct meaning through the communication process because meaning is not an intrinsic thing or idea; it takes other people to construct meanings. There are three assumptions in Hebert Blumer's symbolic interactions, namely: humans act on others on the basis of the meaning that others have, meaning is constructed in the interactions among people, and that meaning is modified through interpretation process. Blumer explained that there are three ways to look at the origin of meanings. The first approach is to consider meaning as an intrinsic thing, the second approach is to see meaning as something brought to an object by people who have the meaning of the object, and the third approach is considering meaning as a "social product" or "a creation constructed in and through people’s defining activities when they interact "[5]. In the view of symbolic interactionism, when interacting, communicators not only interact with other people and with social objects, but also communicate with themselves when making decisions about how to act on the social object. Kuhn refers to this as an action plan guided by verbal attitudes or statements that show values towards actions [6]. Broadly speaking, it can be concluded that Blumer's main idea is that people act on something based on the object’s meaning which is obtained through interaction processes. This study examines on how meanings of the farmers and their families regarding to farming occupations are obtained through their interaction with their social systems and how their actions are oriented towards farming occupations in relation to the meaning construction process.

2. Research Method
This study applied qualitative method designed in the framework of a phenomenological approach. The determination of the research location was conducted purposively in the Tegalmade Village, Mojolaban Subdistrict, Sukoharjo Regency, with the following considerations: Sukoharjo Regency is one of the areas that experiences farmer crisis [7], Tegalmade Village of Mojolaban District is one of the agricultural areas that are starting to lose its agricultural land due to the construction of housing areas and industrialization, the existence of industrialization in this rural areas provides references to other jobs besides farming to the younger generation.

The data were collected through in-depth interviews with 6 informants consisting of two farmers, one farm worker and three young people who are farmers' children. To meet the data validity, two techniques from Lincoln and Guba [8]were used namely triangulation between in-depth interviews and observation data, as well as member check by peer-checking the data with other researchers to obtain the correct understanding or to find deficiencies to be corrected. The data analysis method in this phenomenology research was conducted in several stages [9]namely: the initial phase, the researchers described fully the experienced phenomena into written language; Horizontalization stage, the researchers inventorized statements - important statements relevant to the topic; meaning cluster
phase, the researchers classified statements into themes or units of meaning; description of essence phase, the researchers constructed a comprehensive description of the meaning and experience essence of the subject and Reporting of the research results, the researchers provided more understanding regarding to the way someone construct meaning on a social object, which in this study was farming occupation.

3. Research Results and Discussion
The farmers in this study are rural farmers. Rural farmers, according to Wolf [10] are villagers who grow crops, in which, they grow crops and raise livestock in rural areas, not in enclosed spaces (greenhouses) in the city center or in aspidistra boxes. They are also not agricultural entrepreneurs. The views and meaning on farming occupations were focused on four things, namely income, social status, work comfort and old age insurance. These four factors were derived from Maslow's theory of needs and the two factors theory proposed by Frederick Herzberg [11].

The research results on the meaning of farming occupations identified three views namely negative, neutral, and positive as presented in the following table:

| Table 1. Views of Farming Occupation by the Young Generation |
|-------------------------------------------------------------|
| View            | Meaning                                           | Process (interaction)                      | Result (action)                                                                 |
| Negative        | Low and uncertain income                          | Farmer-mate and school-mate Peer interaction | The expectation from the older generation that the young generation do not become farmers like themselves |
|                 | Identical with low social status                  | Interaction with older farmer generation   | The expectation of the young generation to have an occupation with higher income and social status. |
|                 | Uncomfortable occupation due to the physical environment and the characteristics of farming occupations |                                              | The intention to work in other sectors due to work reference from other parties such as friends, acquaintances or teachers. |
|                 |                                                  |                                              | Low opportunity to work as farmers                                                  |
| Neutral         | Farming is one of available occupation.           | Interacting with family                     | Continuing the parents work as farmer and managing the land inherited from the family |
|                 | Low social status can be changed by improving agricultural technology and land management | Interacting with play-mate peer at home    | Applying agricultural technology to improve income and social status                 |
|                 |                                                  |                                              | The opportunity to work farmers                                                     |
| Positive        | The independence factor and authority to time management in farming occupations | Interacting with family                     | Making farming occupation as an alternative work choice because the job opportunity and requirement in the formal sector are becoming more and more difficult |
|                 |                                                  | Interacting with friends who are engaged in farming and agropreneur. | The high opportunity to work as farmers                                               |

Source: Primary Data Analysis, 2018
The young generation’s views on farming occupation were mostly negative. These negative views were the result of their interaction with their peers or with schoolmates. The negative views resulted in action orientation to work in other sectors according to the references they got from the school environment or from their teacher. Whereas the negative views obtained from interaction with the older generation were simply because the older generation did not want the younger generation to become farmers like themselves. However, there were positive views of the younger generation when they interacted with the youth community who engaged in the world of agriculture and those who do farming and run business in agricultural commodity as well as entrepreneur farmers (agropreneur), for example, some of the young people joined a Whatsapp group of agropreneur, in which they obtain the positive views. One of the meanings of the positive views is that farming is a form of entrepreneurship and independence.

Unlike the younger generation, the older generation gave more positive views to the work of farming. They, in these views, gave meaning to farming as a comfortable occupation because it is their culture and they get to have the freedom to manage their time and resources. These views were obtained in their interaction with friends in their neighborhood who also depend on farming. The followings review the farming occupations by the older generation.

**Table 2. Views of Farming Occupation by the Older Generation**

| View      | Meaning                                                                 | Process (interaction)               | Result (action)                                                                 |
|-----------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Negative  | • An occupation with many risks such as crop failure due to weather/climate changes | • Interacting with their children or other acquaintances | • Not orientating on income level but only on the fulfillment of the basic needs (food) • Opportunity to abandon farming occupations when there are other occupations with higher income and due to increasing daily needs |
| Neutral   | • Appropriate level of income to meet the daily needs                  | • Interacting with fellow farmers who live in rural area | • Limitations of education, skill, and age to access other occupations • Opportunity to stay as farmers |
| Positive  | • Comfortable occupation due to familiar socialization of work system since early childhood. • Freedom in time and resource management. • Reliability to meet the basic need (of food) up to old age | • Interacting with fellow farmers and fellow villagers, or other acquaintances and their families | • Optimizing available resources (land) • Utilizing available spare time to work on other sectors such as construction worker, carpenter, etc. • Keep farming occupation as the main livelihood |

Source: Primary data analysis, 2018

There are various views in the farmers' families toward farming occupations, in which both the young generation (farmers’ children) and the older generation (farmers) have various views on this work when viewed from the level of income, inherent social status, working comfort and old age insurance. The views that were identified were positive, neutral and negative. Each kind gives
different meaning on the views. The meanings and views that occurred were resulted from different interaction processes which also produced different action orientations. This is in accordance with Herbert Blumer's statement that people act toward others on the basis of the meanings that other people have and meanings that are created in the interactions among them.

The younger generation has positive meanings and views when they interact with their own families and when they are in the youth community who are involved in agriculture business. These positive views will result in the young generation’s orientation to work on the farming occupations. Likewise with the older generation or the farmers themselves, they will give positive meanings when they interact with fellow farmers in their environment, or when they have the sense of similar way of life and fate. In other words, when interacting with people who share the same fate, the farmers will continue to make farming occupation as their main job.

4. Conclusion
There are various views among the older generation (farmers) and the younger generation (farmers’ children). The identified views are positive, neutral and negative. The differences in the views are the results of different interaction processes that lead to different action orientations. The younger generation has positive views and meanings when they interact with their families and in the community of young people who are engaged in agriculture especially agricultural entrepreneurship (agropreneur). These positive meanings and views will result in an action orientation to work on the farming occupations. In which the older generation or the farmers themselves have positive views and meanings when they interact with fellow farmers which means that they want to continue to make farming occupations as their main livelihood.

5. Suggestion
In order to encourage the young generation to be interested in farming occupations, a social process that will result in positive meaning among the young generation is needed. One of the social processes that can be pursued is strengthening youth activist groups or communities that engage in the field of agriculture especially agropreneur. More interactions that occur among young people in agricultural groups will further encourage them to be interested in agriculture.

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