

## **FARM LABORER HOUSEHOLDS FROM A SURVIVAL STRATEGY PERSPECTIVE (A Case Study in Tempuran Village, Paron Subdistrict, Ngawi, Indonesia)**



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### **To cite this article:**

Aini, K. I. N., Yuliati, N., & Setiawan, R. F. (2025). Farm Laborer Households from a Survival Strategy Perspective (A Case Study in Tempuran Village, Paron Subdistrict, Ngawi, Indonesia). *Buletin Penelitian Sosial Ekonomi Pertanian Fakultas Pertanian Universitas Haluoleo*, 27(2), 119–129.  
<https://doi.org/10.37149/bpsosek.v27i2.2377>

**Received:** August 12, 2025; **Accepted:** November 22, 2025; **Published:** November 24, 2025

### **ABSTRACT**

Farm laborer households are economically vulnerable due to limited access to land and unstable incomes. This situation puts most farm laborer households in Tempuran Village under high economic pressure. Tempuran Village is an agricultural area where most residents depend on the agricultural sector, but many of them do not own land and therefore work as seasonal farm laborers with fluctuating incomes. This study aims to analyze the level of poverty experienced and survival strategies employed by farm laborers' households in Tempuran Village. This study was conducted in Tempuran Village, Paron Subdistrict, Ngawi District, using a mixed-methods approach, namely in-depth interviews and poverty line calculations from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) 2025, set at IDR 445,865 per capita per month. Data was obtained from 58 farm laborer households. The results of the study indicate that 76.8% of farm laborer households in Tempuran Village are classified as poor, consisting of 12.1% in the poorest category (n=7), 75.8% in the poor category (n=44), and 12.1% in the vulnerable category (n=7). Their average per capita income is only Rp 323,678 per month, reflecting limited access to economic resources and low capacity to meet basic needs. To survive economic pressures, farm laborer households use three main strategies: active strategies (seeking additional work in both agricultural and non-agricultural sectors), passive strategies (reducing consumption and selling assets), and network strategies (utilizing government social assistance or support from family and the surrounding community). Of the 58 respondents, 62.1% implemented active strategies, 58.6% implemented passive strategies, and 77.6% implemented network strategies. Network strategies were the most dominant Strategy, indicating that most households relied on social support to cover income shortfalls. The findings of this study suggest that village governments and social service institutions should design targeted assistance programs.

**Keywords:** farm laborers; poverty; survival strategies.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Poverty is still a structural problem that has become a significant challenge in many regions in Indonesia. East Java Province, one of Indonesia's most populous provinces, had a poverty rate of 9.79% in March 2024, while the national average was 8.57% (BPS, 2024). One of the agriculture-based districts in East Java is Ngawi Regency. Most of the population lives in rural areas and earns a living as farmers or farm laborers. Although agriculture is the primary source of livelihood, the economic condition of farming households, especially farm laborers, remains unstable and vulnerable due to seasonal income and limited access to productive resources.

One village that reflects these conditions is Tempuran Village, located in Paron Subdistrict, Ngawi District. The village is dominated by people working in the agricultural sector, with a large proportion as landless farm laborers. Farm laborers in Tempuran do not rely solely on their primary job in the agricultural sector; they also take on additional jobs such as trading, construction labor, and livestock raising to meet their daily needs. Based on data from the March 2024 Ngawi Regency Poverty Profile, published by the Ngawi Regency BPS in August, 116.47 thousand people in this



region are classified as poor (BPS, 2024). The decline in the poverty rate in recent years is partly due to a shift of labor from agriculture to industry, indicating that work in agriculture no longer guarantees economic security. This reinforces the finding that people with low incomes in Kabupaten Ngawi remain primarily dependent on the agricultural sector.

According to data from the Tempuran Village Government in 2025, the agricultural sector remains the main livelihood of the village community. The majority of the population depends on farming and agricultural labor. The number of farmers in this village exceeds the number of farm laborers, as shown in the data for Tempuran Village. Based on village records, there are 1,889 owner-farmers and 711 tenant farmers, while the number of farm laborers is only 385. Although landowners are dominant in terms of quantity, farm laborers face more complex economic challenges. Dependence on seasonal work, limited access to capital and technology, and a weak bargaining position worsen the economic conditions of farm laborers in this village.

Poverty in farm labor households is not only caused by limited income, but also by limited access to productive assets and decent work opportunities. According to Zulfa et al. (2023), poverty is a condition in which individuals or households live with insufficient income to meet basic needs, such as food, clothing, shelter, education, and health. In their daily lives, farm labor households face complex challenges. In addition to uncertain working conditions, they often have to cope with unexpected expenses, such as medical treatment, children's education, or damage to their home. Therefore, surviving under limited conditions has led them to develop survival strategies that involve side jobs, saving money, and social solidarity.

Several previous studies have examined the survival strategies of households in rural East Java using BPS data and a qualitative approach (Zulfa et al., 2023; Yue et al., 2023). International studies also show the vulnerability of landless farm laborers, such as in China and the United States, where limited access to legal protection and welfare facilities reinforces marginalization (Chen et al., 2023); Iglesias-Rios & Handal, 2025). However, studies specifically examining the survival strategies of landless farm laborers in Tempuran Village, Paron Subdistrict, Ngawi District remain limited, and no mapping has combined BPS statistical data with a qualitative approach at the household level. This gap indicates a significant research need, as each rural area has distinct socio-economic characteristics, and the survival strategies implemented by farm laborers also differ and need to be analyzed locally.

Farm laborers in Tempuran Village use various strategies to survive, including taking on side jobs, cutting back on consumption, and borrowing money from banks or neighbors when the need is urgent. This pattern aligns with findings in West Sumatra, where farm laborers use a combination of strategies, such as taking on additional informal work, borrowing money from family or cooperatives, and reducing consumption of nutritious foods to economize on spending (Juanda et al., 2019). The application of these strategies not only demonstrates economic creativity but also emphasizes the importance of social solidarity and community networks in facing economic uncertainty. This is an important part of rural socio-economic dynamics that needs to be analyzed in depth.

These findings demonstrate that poverty among landless farm laborers is a multidimensional problem, requiring studies that not only measure poverty levels but also examine the strategies households adopt to survive in conditions of persistent economic vulnerability. Building on this background, this study aims to analyze the level of poverty experienced by farm laborers in Tempuran Village and identify the survival strategies they employ. These strategies are categorized into three primary forms: active, passive, and network. This research is expected to add insight into rural sociology by showing, in real terms, how landless farm laborers live amid current rural economic conditions. Specifically, this study has the following objectives: To analyze the level of poverty experienced by farm labor households in Tempuran Village, Paron Subdistrict, Ngawi. To identify and describe the survival strategies adopted by landless farm laborers.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

This research was conducted from May to June in Tempuran Village, Paron Subdistrict, Ngawi Regency. The location was purposively selected because the agricultural sector is the primary source of livelihood for the community, both farmers and farm laborers, and there is a significant number of landless farm laborer households relevant to the research focus. The samples were collected by identifying households that met the criteria, obtaining their consent, and analyzing them. A total of 58 samples met the criteria and were willing to participate from a population of 385 households, which were selected based on the following criteria: not landowners, farm laborers in Tempuran Village, and married farm laborers.



the answers, assigning responses to poverty and survival strategies themes, coding each response, and compiling frequency tables to identify trends within each category. The data was then grouped to make it easier to determine priorities. After the grouping was completed, the researchers drew conclusions, which were compiled into a data presentation. The conclusion was the survival strategies of farm laborer households in Tempuran Village, Paron Subdistrict, Ngawi District, which were obtained through the stages of data collection, reduction, and presentation. To ensure consistency, peer debriefing was used to assess coding and to select illustrative quotes from interviews to reinforce the themes. The interview guide covered the socio-economic conditions of farm laborer households and their survival strategies.

This study did not require formal ethical review board approval because it did not involve intervention or high risk. However, ethical procedures were still followed by explaining the purpose and benefits of the study to respondents, guaranteeing the confidentiality of personal information, and allowing them to refuse to participate. Participants' consent was deemed given verbally after they expressed their willingness to participate.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Poverty Level of Farm Labor Households

The poverty level of farm labor households in Tempuran Village was analyzed using per capita income relative to the BPS poverty line. According to data from BPS Ngawi District in 2024, the poverty line is set at IDR 445,865 per capita per month (BPS, 2024). Household characteristics can affect their ability to earn income and access social assistance, so it is necessary to first look at the demographics of the respondents.

Table 2. Demographics of farm laborer households in Tempuran Village

Characteristics	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age of Farm Laborer	20-39	3	5.2
	40-59	33	56.9
	≥60	22	37.9
Gender	Male	32	55.2
	Female	26	44.8
Highest Level of Education	No Schooling	9	15.5
	Elementary School	33	56.9
	Junior High School	13	22.4
	High School	3	5.2
Number of Family Members	1-2	23	39.7
	3-4	26	44.8
	5-6	9	15.5
	≥ 7	0	0.0
Social Assistance Recipient	Yes	51	87.9
	No	7	12.1

Most farm laborer households are of working age and have low levels of education, which affects their income and access to non-agricultural employment. The main covariates analyzed are education, household size, and receipt of social assistance.

Table 3. Poverty status based on main covariates

Covaraite	Category	Poorest (%)	Poor (%)	Vulnerable (%)	Total
Education	No Schooling	22.2	66.7	11.1	100
	Elementary School	12.1	84.9	3.0	100
	Junior High School	7.7	61.5	30.8	100
	High School	0.0	66.7	33.3	100
Household Size	1-2	13.7	72.7	13.6	100
	3-4	11.1	77.8	11.1	100
	5-6	11.1	77.8	11.1	100
Social Assistance Receipt	Yes	0.0	86.3	13.7	100
	No	100	0.0	0.0	100

The average income of farm laborer households is Rp 971,034 per month, with an average of three family members. Calculated per capita, the average income per individual is Rp 323,678. This figure is below the poverty line, meaning that most farm laborer households live in poverty. This condition is exacerbated by large family sizes, which lead to lower per capita incomes. Approximately 55.2% of income comes from farm labor, including primary and secondary employment, while 44.8% comes from other family members' income.

Table 4. Composition of farm laborer household income in Tempuran Village.

Source of Income	Average per Month (Rp)	Percentage of Total Income (%)
Farm labor (main and side jobs)	535.690	55.2
Income from other household members	435.344	44.8
Total	971.034	100.0

From May to June 2024, the Ngawi Regency was in the dry season. During this period, agricultural activities focused on harvesting and preparing for the next planting season. This transition period affected the availability of work for farm laborers, resulting in unstable income. The income recorded in this study is the actual income during the survey month, averaged per month.

This research is supported by the findings of Utomo et al. (2024), who noted that the total income of potato farming households in Tosari Village, Pasuruan, over one growing season (4 months) amounted to only 20.9 million, or an average of less than 3.5 million per month. This income shows that farm laborers are in a weaker economic position than small farmers. This economic gap in the agricultural sector places farm laborers at the bottom and most economically vulnerable. This is similarly shown in the research of Wahyuni et al. (2025), which indicates that shallot-farming households in Gresik tend to have more stable economic resilience because they can diversify income sources and allocate income to needs beyond food, such as education and social services. Despite differences in regional and commodity characteristics, both studies emphasize farm laborers as the most vulnerable group in the agricultural social structure. Thus, the poverty experienced by farm laborers does not stem solely from low income but also reflects structural poverty due to limited access to productive resources and social security.

Access to social services for farm laborer households found that most informants have government health insurance through the Healthy Indonesia Card (KIS) program, which covers 87.9% of households. However, only around 32.8% of households are recorded as receiving social assistance such as the Family Hope Program (PKH), Non-Cash Food Assistance (BPNT), and village assistance programs such as MMKPM. This indicates that there are still inequalities in the distribution of social assistance that should be targeted to people experiencing poverty. Similar conditions also occur in Batu City, where PKH distribution does not always cover all low-income families due to data errors and communication constraints (Wulandary et al., 2025). Research in Setono Village indicates that although the PKH program has a positive impact, it is misdirected due to limited socialization and access to information among low-income families eligible for assistance (Rahmalita et al., 2025).

Table 5. Results of the poverty category of farm laborers in Tempuran Village.

Poverty Category	Number (Households)	Percentage (%)
Poorest	7	12.1
Poor	44	75.8
Vulnerable	7	12.1

Table 5. It was found that 75.8% of households fall into the poor category, 12.1% into the poorest category, and 12.1% into the vulnerable group. The poorest category is not only faced with a lack of income but also lacks access to social services, such as government-provided health insurance or social assistance. According to the Ministry of Social Affairs' definition, the social safety net comprises social protection programs that help the poor and vulnerable meet their basic needs through various forms of direct assistance and subsidies. This research shows that there are still significant gaps in the coverage of social protection programs, especially in reaching the lowest-income groups. This inequality in access reflects structural constraints that hinder the equitable distribution of assistance, including data, distribution, and technical policies at the local level.

Vulnerable groups with incomes slightly above the poverty line and already accessing social services account for only a small proportion of the informants. This shows that the presence of farm labor households with better economic conditions is minimal and does not reflect the majority. Most

farm laborer households remain in unstable economic conditions and are at risk of poverty in the event of economic pressures, such as crop failure, illness, or job loss.

This uneven distribution of poverty indicates that the problem of poverty among farm laborers is not only related to low income but also to limited access to productive resources, permanent employment, and social services. Thus, this problem is part of structural poverty, which is not easily resolved by direct cash transfers or short-term social programs.

The results of this study are corroborated by previous research by Iqbal et al. (2025) in Nagari Silago, Dharmasraya, which showed that farm laborers who participated in empowerment programs had better access to economic and social facilities, while those who were not involved remained vulnerable. This is an important indicator that poverty reduction should be directed towards sustainable empowerment, not just non-cash transfers.

Similar findings have also been reported in international studies. For instance, Alkire et al. (2022), using the Global Multidimensional Poverty Index, highlight that households in rural areas often experience overlapping deprivations, and that addressing poverty requires integrated strategies beyond income transfers. Moreover, according to the World Bank (2022), more than 9% of the world's population still lives below the international poverty line of US\$2.15 per day, indicating that the economic vulnerability of farm labor households in Indonesia resonates with global poverty conditions. Strategies to address poverty need to focus on improving household economic capacity, strengthening access to education, and community-based empowerment. This condition encourages farm labor households to implement various survival strategies and highlights the need for a multidimensional approach to address rural poverty.

### Survival Strategies of Farm Labor Households

Survival strategies are ways households cope with economic constraints, especially when income is insufficient to meet basic needs. In this case, farm laborer households in Tempuran Village, Paron Sub-district, Ngawi, this Strategy is important. This is because most informants belong to the poor and poorest categories. The high level of poverty compels them to use various methods to meet their daily needs and survive the severe economic pressure. The following table shows the frequency of survival strategies by poverty category.

Table 6. Frequency of survival strategies based on poverty categories

Strategy Type	Poorest (%)	Poor (%)	Vulnerable (%)
Active Strategy	13.9	66.7	19.4
Passive Strategy	14.7	82.4	2.9
Network Strategy	6.7	88.9	4.4

Based on Table 6, the frequency of survival strategies among farm laborer households differs across poverty categories. Poor households mainly implement active strategies (66.7%), passive strategies (82.4%), and network strategies (88.9%), indicating that this group utilizes various adaptation mechanisms to cope with economic constraints. The poorest group tends to have limited capacity, so the frequency of strategies applied is relatively low, whereas the vulnerable group is more selective and uses strategies less frequently. These results confirm differences in adaptation capabilities across poverty categories.

Based on research conducted through in-depth interviews and field observations, the survival strategies used by farm labor households in this village can be grouped into three types: active, passive, and network strategies. These three forms of strategies are carried out simultaneously or alternately, depending on the situation and economic conditions of each farm laborer household.

Based on the research results, household survival strategies are illustrated in Table 7, which combines the type of Strategy, examples of activities or quotes from respondents, and the prevalence (%) of households reporting that Strategy.

Table 7. Survival strategy matrix

Type of Strategy	Examples of Activities/Quotes	Prevalence (%)
Active Strategy	Additional work: trader, farmer, domestic helper. "Besides working on other people's land, I also work in people's homes cleaning." (Respondent 6)	62.1
Passive Strategy	Passive Strategy: Reducing food consumption, postponing needs. "When income is low, we usually do not buy side dishes or vegetables for the day." (Respondent 50)	58.6

Table 7. Survival strategy matrix

Type of Strategy	Examples of Activities/Quotes	Prevalence (%)
Network Strategy	Assistance from family, neighbors, and social assistance. "Sometimes we borrow rice from neighbors." (Respondent 43)	77.6

Based on Table 7, farm laborer households implement various survival strategies with varying prevalence. These results indicate that farm laborer households combine productive, adaptive, and social strategies to cope with income constraints and economic pressures.

### 1. Active Strategy

Active strategies are efforts households make to increase or maintain income through additional work. This Strategy is implemented in response to the instability of income from the main job as a farm laborer, which is highly dependent on the season and the availability of work on other people's land. This Strategy involves additional work by farm laborers and other household family members to increase income.

The results show that most informants stated that, apart from working on other people's farms, they also seek additional work, especially outside the planting or harvesting seasons. Daily construction labor is one option for them to supplement their income. Based on data from 58 respondents, 41.38% (24 people) reported having additional jobs in addition to farm labor. The types of work varied, including construction workers (10.34%), small traders (15.52%), livestock farmers (8.62%), and the remaining respondents (6.90%) working as domestic helpers. This finding indicates that non-agricultural employment has become an essential part of livelihood diversification among farm laborers, allowing them to maintain household income stability during the agricultural off-season. This is reinforced by research showing that income from non-agricultural work, such as construction labor and grocery store work, contributes significantly to the total income of farming households (Agustin et al., 2024).

The utilization of home yards is a capital-efficient diversification alternative. Planting vegetables such as spinach, kale, and chili not only meets household consumption needs but can also be sold to increase income. However, the contribution from this activity is additional and unreliable, as the income they receive is quite small. This result differs from the research of Endriani et al. (2022), which shows that the utilization of yard land in Nyogam Village can generate around 1.4-2 million per quarter. However, the study emphasized that this income is seasonal and has not replaced the primary source of income.

Small-scale chicken and goat farming by farm laborers in Tempuran Village is a form of productive diversification that allows households to sell livestock when they face urgent needs, such as school fees or medical treatment. This research aligns with a study in Sukunan Hamlet, Yogyakarta, which found that villagers use village land to raise native chickens and goats productively. Free-range chickens are used as a source of eggs or meat, for which demand is relatively stable, while goats are often raised for sale during events such as celebrations or holidays. This activity provides household income, although it remains irregular (Mudawaroch et al., 2022).

Another activity undertaken by farm laborers in Tempuran Village as an additional job is working as a household assistant in the surrounding area. This type of work is chosen because it is easily accessible, does not require specialized skills, and offers flexible working hours. The income earned can supplement household income when the husband's income is insufficient, or the woman becomes the head of the family. This research is supported by the results of research from Afifah et al. (2025) showing that women in the informal sector, such as household assistants, tend to rely on this work as a form of survival in their households, especially when the husband's income is insufficient, or they are the head of the household at home. This reinforces the finding that off-farm work, although low paid, is a short-term solution for poor rural households to maintain economic sustainability.

This Strategy shows that farming households are adaptive, recognizing that agricultural income alone is not sufficient; they need to diversify their economic activities. Research by Nugroho et al. (2022) reveals that income from forest products and other non-farm activities strengthens household incomes and contributes to household sustainability.

Their active strategies do show initiatives to expand income sources, but often do not yield maximum results due to limited human and financial capital. Research by Choudhury and Wu (2023) confirms that diversification without adequate skills and education does not sufficiently improve economic adaptation. This leaves them only able to access low-wage and irregular jobs. In addition, the availability of alternative employment in rural areas is minimal, so not all diversification efforts succeed in increasing their income.

This active Strategy shows that households are not passive in facing poverty. They realize that relying on a single source of income is insufficient, so they need to diversify their economic activities. This Strategy observed among farm labor households in Tempuran Village is similar to the findings of Sultana et al. (2015), who reported that rural households in Bangladesh also diversify their income as a common coping strategy among economically vulnerable households. However, this Strategy has its limits, mainly due to limited job availability in the village and the low educational levels of most informants: 42 out of 58 respondents (72.4%) have only completed primary school or less, which restricts them to low-wage jobs.

## 2. Passive Strategy

Passive strategies are a form of household adjustment to income shortfalls, involving adjustments in expenditure and saving on daily needs. In uncertain economic conditions, many farm laborer households choose to reduce consumption of nutritious food, postpone the purchase of secondary needs, or even rely on assistance from the surrounding community. Based on the study's results, most participants economize on food. They consume more simple foods such as rice with a side dish of tofu and tempeh or vegetables from their own garden. Meat and milk are only consumed on certain occasions, such as holidays. In fact, some only eat twice a day to save on rice. They also use garden produce such as cassava, papaya leaves, bananas, and others as ingredients in their food. As one respondent stated, "We usually eat rice with tempeh or vegetables from our garden. Meat is only for Eid or weddings; on normal days we cannot afford it." (Interview, Respondent).

Other expenses that they save on include clothing, education, and health, which are also kept to a minimum. Their children's school fees are paid when due. Health care is provided at the health center or traditionally through drinking herbal medicine or visiting a masseuse. This pattern of savings is similar to that found in Tombatu Dua Utara Village, where they lack food and control consumption by applying this passive Strategy. Another study also illustrates how poor farmer households rely on consumption control and on-farm products to reduce daily expenses (Febrianti et al., 2021). Similarly, Zaeni et al. (2022) found that flower-farming households in West Bandung also reduced non-primary expenses to survive economic crises. This suggests that passive strategies are a typical response among poor farming households in the face of economic pressure, especially when access to economic and social resources is limited.

Passive strategies are ways to survive in challenging economic conditions. Saving on food, education, and health needs is the most feasible option when income is minimal. While this Strategy can help ease the economic burden in the short term, it has limits in its application. It can affect the fulfillment of essential household needs. Therefore, passive strategies are only temporary adjustments that arise because there are no better options. This condition shows that farm labor households still face various limitations, both in accessing assistance and in other supporting resources. The finding is consistent with Kemper et al. (2023), who found that low-income families tend to reduce the quantity and variety of food consumption during crises. In addition, Budiawati et al. (2024) demonstrated that, during economic shocks, households prioritize expenditures on staple foods over other needs.

## 3. Network Strategy

Network strategy is a form of adaptation that relies on social relations, both with family, neighbors, and social institutions. In rural communities with strong social ties, relationships between individuals are an important source of assistance, both material and non-material. In this study, it was found that some farm laborers receive assistance from family members who have migrated, obtain loans from neighbors without interest, or rely on government social programs such as PKH, BPNT, and MMKPM. Kinship relations and social solidarity in the village become important social capital in the survival strategy. As one respondent explained: "Sometimes, when we do not have money to buy rice, we borrow from the nearest neighbor. Often, we are even given cooked rice and side dishes, so the support from those around us greatly helps us." (Interview, Respondent). Furthermore, the research data show that 87.9% (51 out of 58 respondents) receive assistance from government social programs such as PKH, BPNT, and MMKPM, further emphasizing the crucial role of external support in sustaining the livelihoods of farm labor households.

Involvement in social groups is also one way they survive. Social groups, such as neighborhood gatherings and women's recitation groups, are important sources of social support. These social relationships form an informal network that can be relied upon during a crisis. In some cases, the community also conducts cooperation activities, such as repairing damaged houses, which is evidence that social solidarity is still alive in the village. This situation reflects the importance of social capital in village life. The social capital of farm laborers can be seen in their participation in

community activities, which serve as places to help one another and share information. Research by Nugraha et al. (2024) indicates that social capital plays a significant role in enhancing family resilience in rural areas, particularly amid economic pressures. In addition, Yusriadi (2025) found that social ties within a community can strengthen individuals' resilience in crises.

Social networks not only provide material assistance but also a sense of security for households facing economic pressures. With this, they can help each other, whether through direct assistance, loans, or the exchange of information on economic opportunities. Efendi and Khairussalam (2023) explain that family and community networks in the village are the main support for farming households in facing difficult times, such as the lean season or rising prices of basic commodities. Research by Febrianti et al. (2021) also shows that rural farming households tend to rely on social networks as part of their survival strategy, especially when other economic strategies are insufficient.

This network strategy relies heavily on individuals' activity in establishing social relations. Closed households often do not get enough help or information. Therefore, social engagement is important for this Strategy to be effective. The existence of this social network provides a sense of social security, even though it is informal. However, not all households have equal access to these networks. The poorest households often face difficulties accessing assistance, either due to a lack of information or social stigma.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS**

The study shows that 76.8% of farm laborer households in Tempuran Village live below the poverty line due to limited land ownership and precarious employment. Active, passive, and network strategies reflect household resilience and gaps in social support. These findings can inform policies, such as targeting social assistance, village skills programs, smallholder farming schemes, and women's employment support. The study is limited by the small sample size and respondents' recall, so further research should be conducted over multiple seasons to observe changes and evaluate empowerment programs. Local governments need to encourage farm laborer empowerment programs and strengthen support for community social networks. These efforts are important for helping them survive amid economic pressures and for improving household finances.

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

The author would like to express his deepest gratitude to all respondents, namely the farming households in Tempuran Village, Paron Subdistrict, Ngawi Regency, for taking the time to share their experiences and provide valuable information for this research. The author would also like to thank the Tempuran Village Government for their assistance and for providing the necessary data. The author acknowledges that this research was self-funded. The author also extends gratitude to the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) and local farmers' group associations for their support and contribution in facilitating data collection. The author would like to extend special recognition to the supervisor and colleagues who provided constructive feedback, as well as family and friends who consistently offered moral support throughout the research process.

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