

## **Philosophizing from the Farmer's View: A Preliminary Investigation**

Beljun P. Enaya  
University of Santo Tomas;  
Visayas State University

### **Abstract**

In an attempt to contribute to the discussion of the philosophy of agriculture, this paper introduces a preliminary philosophical discourse on the views of the farmers of the Municipality of San Francisco, Southern Leyte. It seeks to philosophize from the vantage point of the farmers. It uses thematic analysis from the face-to-face interview with the selected farmers. Then, it purposefully integrates a method, which I call, "Philosophizing from" – a process of philosophical discourse that proceeds from the views of the participants. The result of inquiry leads to the recognition of the condition, challenges, and continuity in the life of the farmers. Thus, this preliminary investigation acknowledges the reality of agricultural life expressed from the farmer's perspective.

**Keywords:** philosophizing, farmer, agriculture, condition, challenge, continuity

### **Introduction**

The philosophy of agriculture (or agricultural philosophy) may not be so attractive that it is not very popular among contemporary philosophers in the Philippines (or globally). While it is true that there has been a lot of agricultural research and technological advancement to improve agricultural life, some agricultural scientists are not familiar with the philosophy of agriculture. The trend nowadays is very much focused on addressing the issues of productivity using agricultural technology. Perhaps, in

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that scenario, philosophy tends to become suppressed or apart from the awareness of the agricultural scientist.

In his recently published book, “Agriculture and Philosophy: Agricultural Science in Philosophy, Lindsay Falvey (2020) exposes and proves that there has been agricultural philosophy from a historical view of philosophy and different practices, including his own encounters. His understanding of philosophy anchors in the pursuit of wisdom that spans “the full breadth of useful knowledge” and that which “enhances our wellbeing and ease of living within all other elements of nature (Falvey, p. viii).” Because Falvey is primarily an agricultural scientist, criticisms against his rare venture on philosophy are very possible. However, one point to learn from his book is that “agricultural science impoverishes itself when it operates as technology separated from context (p. viii).” This message is certainly true in the context of our agricultural fields in the Philippines. Some government interventions that seek to help the local farmers are not based on research and the context of the local farmers. Sometimes, a government agency allocates aid to farmers because it is compelled to distribute the already-procured supplies.

The concern of this paper is not about whether there is a philosophy of the farmers or not. However, the task is more on understanding the issues of the local farmers to see a deeper context in addressing the pressing problems they encounter. In this paper, I attempt to bring the views of the farmers to philosophical discourse. The aim is to clarify the views of the farmers by discussing different implications of their concerns and views. The views of the farmers are conditioned by their own experience and their locality in San Francisco, Southern Leyte. The views are gathered from the face-to-face key informant interview in November 2021. From these data, I thematize my discussion which attempts to philosophize the views of the farmers.

## Methodology

This paper employs thematic analysis from the key informant interviews. It utilizes general themes from the responses of the interviewees. The data gathered are only the bases for philosophizing. In this case, the philosophical approach of this paper utilizes “philosophizing from” which proposes a philosophical discourse from the themes of the gathered data. The location of this study is in San Francisco, Southern Leyte, Philippines, which is a municipality that claims to be an agricultural town.

The respondents were chosen using convenience sampling with the help of the municipal agricultural technician. In the interview, there were nine participants. They consisted of five presidents of the farmer's associations, three non-officer farmers, and one Municipal Agricultural Officer (MAO) who is also a farmer himself. They were interviewed from November 13-14, 2021. The number of respondents qualifies only for this initial investigation to start researched and documented philosophical discourse for the municipality.

The interview with the farmers proceeded with the approval of the municipal mayor, MAO, and the participants. They were informed of the questions and intention of the interview. These permissions were documented for the purpose of this paper. For this paper, the names of the participants are withheld due to confidentiality.

The questions were categorized into five parts: Part 1-General View, Part 2-The Farmer's Own Life, Part 3-Farmers, Youth and Community, Part 4-Moral View, and Part 5-Political View. For this paper, the preliminary investigation and philosophical discourse revolve around the general view and the farmer's own life. The answers were recorded manually with the assistance of the agricultural technician and a digital recorder.

## **Philosophy with a preposition: philosophy of, philosophy at, philosophy for, and philosophy from**

It seems that I am offering a kind of philosophy in this paper. However, as much as I want to contribute to philosophy, I am more concerned with philosophical processing that leads to a better articulation of the position of the farmers of San Francisco. Hence, I discuss first the different approaches to viewing the philosophical discourses from the vantage point of prepositions.

The most common phrase is “philosophy of”. This expression connotes a possession. In this case, philosophy is the possession of something or someone. For instance, the philosophy of Aristotle means that the idea is owned by him or attributed to him. The philosophy of indigenous people is another example that implies a philosophy that belongs to a certain group of people. In this expression, one explores and discovers a philosophy that is attributed to a person or community.

One contribution of Jeffrey Ocaj in philosophy is his “Philosophy at the Margins”, which “aims to understand the philosophy of work of the elderly people in many remote villages and indigenous communities in the Philippines (Ocaj, 2015, p. 9).” The use of the phrase “philosophy at” suggests that philosophy is at a particular location. In the case of Ocaj’s article, philosophy is located at a marginal place. With this, there is always a place for philosophy in each physical milieu. The presumption can be drawn that one can learn a certain philosophy from a particular place.

In another circumstance, “philosophy for” indicates that philosophy will be provided to a certain person or context. For instance, philosophy for children is geared towards educational development. Philosophy in this case is brought to children. Believing in the capacity of the children to philosophize, Mathew Lipman has introduced a community of inquiry wherein everyone collaborates to discover new ideas (Elicor, 2016). Nevertheless, it must not be neglected that in the progress of philosophy for children,

there is already a contention that there is also a philosophy *of* children. Besides, the use of *with* in the development of philosophy for children (P4wC) reiterates the fact of the pedagogical approach to children's engagement in philosophizing. Indeed, Elicor (2019) attempts to integrate philosophy for/with children in the community of inquiry from the indigenous community. However, what is being emphasized in the phrase "philosophy for" is the purposive act or movement of bringing philosophy to a certain place, community, or context. The integration of "philosophy with" supports the fact that philosophizing is a collaborative effort.

The more fitting phrase for this paper is "philosophy from". The phrase suggests that philosophy comes from a certain source. Although it may indicate that the point of origin possesses *the* philosophy, it may also emphasize the clarity of the fact that *a* philosophy is learned or discovered. It may really sound the same as "philosophy of" and even "philosophy at". However, the emphasis on "from" is specifically focused on the process. In this paper, I avoid using the noun form "philosophy" because the term philosophy may be taken as a general body of knowledge. Instead, I use the progressive form, "philosophizing". Between the noun and the progressive verb, this paper takes the advantage of the "philosophizing from" to indicate the approach or process of learning from the data and forming philosophical ideas that are not definite in terms of locating and identifying the philosophy of farmers. One philosophical approach of Masahiro Morioka (2012) in understanding life, i.e., *inochi*, is his interpretation of the views of the various Japanese people, and it leads him to his proposed metaphysical concepts. Similarly, there is an abstention from identifying the gathered data here as a philosophy of farmers. There is even no intention of formulating a philosophical framework or philosophical system for the farmers. However, the farmer's view serves as the basis of philosophizing to draw a philosophical discourse that attempts to address the concerns of the farmers. Hence, philosophizing means articulating the view, in this case – the farmer's, and laying down the meaning and implications beyond their apparent views.

## The Municipality of San Francisco: The Claim to be Agricultural

The municipality of San Francisco was promulgated in “1951 by the Executive Order No. 192 issued by President Elpidio Quirino (Municipality of San Francisco, n.d.)” It is one of the municipalities of Panaon Island, which is just across Limasawa Island, Southern Leyte. It has 22 barangays. There also live an indigenous people, who are “migrant Mamanwa settlers in a semi-kin-based community at Brgy. Pinamudlan,...who came from Gigaquit, Surigao del Norte (Ponce, 2018, p. 98).” However, most original residents in San Francisco are migrants from Bohol.

In the official seal of the municipality (*see figure 1*), two major symbols can be identified: a boat and a carabao. These two symbols, which are located at the center of the seal, seem to signify the life of the municipality. The boat and the carabao provide clues that the municipality is mainly an agricultural town. It is indeed true because the geographical location shows the proximity between the mountains and the sea. Hence, the major livelihood is actually fishing and farming.



*Figure 1.* Official Seal of the Municipality of San Francisco  
(Retrieved from

<https://southernleyte.gov.ph/images/stories/symbols/sanfrancisco.jpg>)

Furthermore, the religious aspect may also contribute to the understanding of municipal life. The parish patron saint is St. Isidore who is known for being the patron of farmers. One may wonder why the name of the municipality is San Francisco but the patron saint is

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St. Isidore. According to the traditional story, the image of St. Isidore arrived first instead of the image of San Francisco, so, out of respect, the people took St. Isidore as their patron saint (Municipality of San Francisco, n.d.). Eventually, the parish or the municipality celebrates its fiesta on the feast day of St. Isidore, and the parish celebrates its parish day on the feast day of St. Francis Xavier.

These two visualizations as represented by the official seal and patron saint may not sufficiently prove that the municipality is agricultural land, but these symbols certainly reflect the life of the people as, at least, close to agricultural life. This premise incidentally justifies the location of this study to be appropriate, aside from the fact that I grew up in this town.

### **The consciousness of the farmers**

In the interview, the farmers provide common expressions that show the conscious life experience from the immediate answers of the farmers. The following are the basic/general questions I ask:

1. *Kumusta man ang mga mag-uuma karon?* (How are the farmers today?)
2. *Unsa diay ang agrikultura para nimo?* (What is agriculture for you?)
3. *Unsay imong nakita diha sa pag-uma?* (What do you see in farming?)

The farmers' response to the first question is either "lisud" (difficult) or "ok ra" (fine). The response to the second question revolves around the idea of planting, working, and the foundation of the economy. The response to the third mainly indicates farming as a source of food or living.

The view of the farmers about their status which is described from fine to difficult seems to be an inconsistent response in terms of the condition of life. However, the real expression of "ok ra"

(fine) does not mean a life that is the same with privileged people. This response is qualified when the farmers express that “ok ra” refers to the times when a farmer can bring food to their table from the fruit of their labor. In other words, a farmer is still trying to feel satisfied because he/she can savor the harvest even if it’s not every day. Nevertheless, the actual meaning of their response manifests a struggle in life to sustain their source of living. Hence, for the farmers, life is a struggle.

The farmers believe that agriculture is a contact with nature that supports other life sustenance. Tilling the land is a form of work. This work is of value to the farmers. Moreover, the emphasis on being the “backbone” of the economy expresses the fact that farmers believe that their work with the land is very relevant to human life and society. In this regard, we can immediately ask: how much is really being valued in farming? How do the farmers actually value the importance of their contribution and how much the society concretely appreciate the value of the farmers? These questions need not be addressed yet in this paper because these questions involve another deeper analysis.

In connection to the first and second responses, the farmers see their work on the farm as a source of their living. The basic beneficiary of farming is the family of the farmers because they work mainly to provide food for the family. They value the fact that through farming or working on the farm, they have something to hold onto in their daily life. There is a kind of assurance for daily consumption, but this assurance remains in question at some point.

What we can learn from the farmer’s consciousness is that their life remains difficult even if they believe that they could always get something from farming and even if their work is important. Thus, we also need to see what and how they see their problems as farmers.



## Viewing the Problem

I find the problems of the farmers as the most important part of this philosophizing. The farmer's listing of problems allows us to see what we need to address. However, beyond the problems perceived by the farmers, there might also be some problems that, perhaps, cannot be neglected due to its being viral in the uttered problems. In this regard, I ask simple questions such as:

1. *Unsa may mga problema sa pag-uma?* (What are the problems in farming?)

2. *Giunsa man pagtubag sa mga problema sa pag-uma?* (How are these problems being addressed?)

The first and most persisting problem that challenges the farmers is in terms of financial capacity. Farming entails capital, not just human capital, but basically monetary capital to maintain the farm, e.g., fertilizers. Aside from this, farmers clamor for low profit from their labor, and, consequently, they will again be needing more financial assistance. The other major concern of the farmers is the land. Many of these farmers are not landowners. They only rent the land, or they work as farmers because of compensation. What's worse is that when there is possible agricultural land, the owner does not want it to be cultivated. Also, there are lands like forest areas that are already restricted by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR). For some farmers in the upland area, they can also benefit from the forest even just for a small portion of it, but because of new policies, they have difficulty cultivating and benefiting the land. Lastly, seasonal calamity or seasonal factors in farming pushes the farmers to look for alternative sources of income. This means that they cannot rely on the harvest because work on the farm or harvest from the farm is not daily.

In the usual practice of the farmers, the answer to the financial challenge is through a loan, such as borrowing money or items in exchange for a certain amount of their harvest. However, the Philippine government, through the Department of Agriculture, provides a different form of assistance to the farmers through the

farmers' association. It must be noted that there are at least 9 farmer's associations in the municipality, and most of them are accredited associations; each barangay also has a women's association, which sometimes benefits from agricultural programs. The association helps the farmers to alleviate their problems. A few associations utilize the idea of cooperative work. The idea of Sheldon Agaton (2021) about cooperativism, where the association members work together for common goals, is also manifesting in the associations of the farmers in San Francisco (but the cooperative institution is not clearly appreciated yet). For instance, the association works on a certain project or land, and the members help each other to maintain the project or land. However, this cooperative work is different from the old version of cooperation which was called "hongos". Traditionally, "hongos" was practiced by the farmers (particularly rice farmers) in San Francisco. It refers to voluntary cooperation. Farmers who are neighbors in terms of their farmed land take turns helping each other as neighbors. For instance, during planting and harvest season, when one farmer schedules planting or harvesting, the neighboring farmers will help in planting or harvesting. In this case, there is no monetary compensation. What each farmer gets is reciprocal help from his/her neighboring farmers. Today, farmers in San Francisco do not practice "hongos" anymore. They are organized through the association. Usually, they benefit from the government's assistance through the association. Also, the association can lobby their concerns to any concerned authority. However, the efficiency of the association as a step to address some individual problems of the farmers and as a group remains to be assessed.

From the problems to the existing solutions perceived by the farmers, the views of the farmers seem to value productivity that leads to greater income. The financial challenge and the little aid from the government may only be a vicious circle without addressing the gap. The farmers believe that at some point farming itself assists their immediate needs, but the real challenge is the sustainability of farming in terms of livelihood that really depends on farming. Among the three major problems, which are financial,

land and seasonal challenges, the concern for finances depicts a serious issue among farmers. Although a holistic approach is acknowledged, there might still be something else that needs to be identified.

### **The farmer's life**

From the condition to the problems of the farmers, the farmers' view on their own life need to be recognized to understand completely the concerns from their experiences. For this section, the questions are:

1. *Unsay pagsabot nimo sa "mag-uuma nga milambo"?* (What is your understanding of "a farmer who progresses"?)
2. *Unsa may imong prinsipyo isip mag-uuma?* (What is your principle as a farmer?)
3. *Unsay mga nakat-unan nimo sa kinabuhi isip mag-uuma?* (What do you learn from the farmer's life?)
4. *Giunsa nimo pagsugakod isip mag-uuma?* (How did you overcome the challenges of a farmer?)

The farmers believe that progress can be seen when a farmer is: happy, still farming, able to let the children finish their educational program, is gaining from his own labor and is growing in all aspects of life. It can be observed that progress includes both material and immaterial aspects of life. It seems that there is no separation between materiality and immateriality of progress. Happiness in farming can be manifested in the continuity of working as a farmer. Profit and children's educational achievement are results of labor.

The primary principle of a farmer is to work. Working is not mere working which is doing what is being told or doing something irregularly. For the farmers, work requires hard work (*pagkugi*) or diligence. However, working also needs planning and managing. A farmer cannot sustain his life as a farmer without making his work his passion.

The most valuable lesson from the farmers is that taking care of the farm needs to be constant, a daily routine. One farmer beautifully expressed the daily care as “*di mapa ang tunob*” (footprints never fade). Taking care is like taking care of a child, and that implies focus and alertness. This care also requires sacrifice and cooperation. This could also mean that farming is not only for the farmer himself/herself but also for other people around him.

Overcoming the challenges is not an easy task. Living as a farmer entails praying to God for good health, which keeps the farmer continuing to work. Continuity is really a factor in facing problems. This continuity perhaps means to keep going by caring for the farm. “Way atrasay” (no giving up) allows the farmer to succeed in his goals. Overcoming can only be realized by the farmer’s true desire. “Kontra-gusto” (unwillingness) will certainly hinder the farmer to achieve his goal. Therefore, some farmers are not happy with their own gain because of being pushed by their own circumstances, without truly willing to work. Above all this, one consideration, according to a farmer, is the farmer’s relationship with other people. Good relationship among people helps the farmer. For instance, the practice of “hongos” before shows a good relationship with neighboring farmers. Also, a good relationship with the people means protection with your own farm. A farmer is not just helping himself/herself but at the same time helping other people, either in teaching them to farm or providing them with what they need.

### **Condition, Challenge, and Continuity**

The farmer’s view speaks that life is difficult for them. The condition of the farmers in San Francisco calls for comprehensive attention because the municipality itself is trying to project a symbol for agriculture. It must also be noted that the farmers do not refuse any progressive approach, but they need a concrete and holistic approach to their needs. If farmers believe that they are food

producers of the society, then perhaps this belief is only a dream for now because most farmers cannot actually provide more than the family's basic consumption. The fact that the condition of farming and produce depend on several factors challenges the government to assist the farmers from start to end process and to avoid interventional programs that are one-shot-and-for-compliance activities. However, the capacity of the farmers to look for ways or to keep struggling is enough proof that they are ready for any programs that address their concerns. The farmers value their work since it can sustain their basic needs, but this value tends to be true to farmers alone because the appreciation of the society for the farmers remains a wishful thought.

The condition of difficulty is not yet a challenge. It is a condition of life that sets the perspective of the farmers. The challenge that is referred to in this paper is the different life forms or objects that enable the condition to either become worse or better. It may not be something wrong per se, but it is part of the process of moving forward. For instance, lack of finances, the problem of land, and seasonal factors are challenges that may either help the farmers become innovative or unimaginative. For the farmers, the challenges they perceive are problems they encounter. However, these problems do not stop them to live. Thus, the challenge of the condition results in continuity.

As viewed by the farmers, despite the condition and challenges, they must still work. Continuity can be understood in at least two ways. The first is the continuity of the cycle of the condition and problems. Second is the continuity of life as a farmer who learns to move forward from the condition. The first meaning is what the farmers have been avoiding. The second understanding of continuity is what the farmers intend to practice. The value of working on the farm does not make them less human. The care for other people or society justifies continuity in this sense. However, work and care are nothing without the desire to really face the land. This desire motivates the farmers to continue their life. At this point, it must not be construed that the difficulty in the life of the farmers

is what they desire. The point is that the desire of the farmers to be farmers makes them realize the continuity of life as a farmer. Some claim to be farmers but do not actually have the desire to constantly be present on their agricultural land. Hence, the persistence and consistency of being a farmer make it more concrete in understanding continuity.

## Conclusion

Philosophizing from the farmer's view entails a closer look at the perceived situation of the farmers in the Municipality of San Francisco. In this paper, an alternative understanding has not been insisted. However, providing a philosophical discourse from the views of the farmers produce a deeper perspective in addressing the issues of the farmers and in agriculture in general. At least the condition, challenge, and continuity seek to argue that the farmer's view and their perceived life need not to be neglected in giving interventions in their way of life. Philosophizing from the farmer's view may create further discussions for the welfare of the farmers. It is recommended that any external interventions must, at least, go through a philosophical discourse to create a more comprehensive action.

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Figure 1. Official Seal of the Municipality of San Francisco. Retrieved from <https://southernleyte.gov.ph/images/stories/symbols/sanfrancisco.jpg>