

Uncovering Barriers to Sustainable Oil Palm Farming: Evidence from Independent Smallholders in Johor, Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

This research identifies the principal obstacles obstructing the adoption of sustainable farming practices among independent oil palm smallholders in Johor, Malaysia. Employing a quantitative, cross-sectional design, survey data from 301 farmers were analysed utilising descriptive and inferential statistics. Three significant obstacles arose: (1) Institutional: Merely 15.0% attained MSPO/RSPO certification, significantly below national objectives; (2) Knowledge and economic: Adoption rates for knowledge-intensive practices remain low (natural pest control $M=3.15$, composting $M=3.25$), despite a moderate overall adoption rate ($M=3.39$); (3) Support deficit: Government support received the lowest score ($M=3.10$ on a 5-point scale), with only 19.6% indicating receipt of subsidies. The Pearson correlation indicated a moderate positive correlation between perceived government support and the adoption of practices ($r=0.42$, $p<.01$). Notwithstanding obstacles, self-reported environmental, social, and economic performance remained elevated ($M>3.52$), indicating possible advantages from implementation. The findings highlight the necessity for policy interventions that address the economic constraints and resource limitations faced by independent smallholders in order to align sustainability policies.

JEL Codes:

Keywords: *sustainable agriculture, oil palm; independent smallholders, adoption barriers, certification (MSPO/RSPO), government support*