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A Review on the Evolution of Agribusiness in the 21st Century

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ABSTRACT

The field of agribusiness has diversified further to include large scale of various disciplines such as sustainability, economics, business management and agriculture. This discussion traces the development of agribusiness that started as a conceptual idea by Davis in 1955 to its present position as a global scholarly discipline. Some of the significant changes it notes that have been realized between the twentieth and twenty-first centuries include the changes caused by automation and productivity-based systems to customer-centric systems, tech-enabled systems and sustainability-focused systems. There are arguments by some academics that agribusiness is a bad thing to the environment, corporate greed, and neoliberal policies, and others hold that agribusiness is good in terms of innovation, growth, and rural development. This review explores the redefinition of agribusiness, which alternative views agribusiness as a driver of development towards a more modern society and the source of inequity and environmental pressures. Examples of areas that have been identified as deficient include talks about the ethical consideration of digital agriculture, approaches to changing the climate change, and the social and political impacts of globalized value chains. New paradigms are emerging in order to discover the compromise between efficiency, inclusivity, and environmental responsibility, the bioeconomy and circular agriculture. In its essence agribusiness is one of the fields where the economic, social, and environmental interests clash, yet it has become a mighty force of change in food systems as well.

INTRODUCTION

The agribusiness under the umbrella of Intersection of the farming, economics, and management is a relatively new academic discipline that has gained significant importance over the last few years. The agricultural value chain consists of the interdependent supply of inputs, production, processing, marketing, as well as distribution (Investopedia, n.d.). The evolution of food systems reflects the basic shifts that have taken place in food systems, and it also reveals the consolidation of the discipline during the 20th and 21st centuries. The literature has changed in that there are the models that are more technology-centered, sustainability and internationally integrated and no longer concentrate on production and subsidy. Nevertheless, even as it becomes more widespread it is still under debate how scholars limit it and how it will impact the livelihoods of rural populations as well as the overall social, economic, and environmental impacts.

It is documented that research findings about the operation of agribusiness are many. According to Camargos *et al.* (2021), this has been used to refer to the intersection of cattle farming, industrial production, trade, and commerce highlighting its importance to the international food supply chain. Bairwa and Singh (2015) expand on this notion, by linking the production, processing, and marketing activities of agribusiness to higher incomes in rural regions, new working places as well as food security. According to Curmally *et al.* (2015), who broaden the definition of agribusiness to include

the manufacture, storage, and distribution of industrial farm equipment, it emerges as a key to access to food and equity in emerging countries. Others emphasize more the system-level integration (Camargos *et al.*, 2021), others putting more emphasis on developmental results (Bairwa & Singh, 2015), and others focusing more on the redistributive effects of agribusiness in world markets (Curmally *et al.*, 2015). All these perspectives admit that agribusiness involves a lot more than just farming.

Additional support of the diversification of agribusiness development is given through the context specific studies. Agriculture has a significant contribution to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of Indonesia, trade, human capital, and the environment (Feni *et al.*, 2024). Digital innovations on the other hand, are emerging as potential solutions to such issues as market unpredictability and inability to have access to technology (Wanda *et al.*, 2024). Conversely, systemic barriers as well as possible opportunities have been identified in researches conducted within the Philippines. Agribusiness can build livelihoods and repair the ecologies in conflict-prone regions, as Malik (2024) points out, and other high-value products such, as mushrooms, are found by Rodriguez (2024) to be feasible ways to grow the local economy. When covering the issue of youth disengagement and advancing agripreneurship, Santiago and Roxas (2015) highlight such educational interventions as Family Farm Schools and SAKA program. Other study carried in Philippines revealed that the sector is limited by institutional deficiencies. Manalili *et al.* (2015) point out inefficiencies in rice processing and

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market facilities in the Luzon, Visayas and Mindanao, whereas Guro (2024) points to insufficient data systems and policy gaps in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM). In Indonesia, however, the stage is assumed by technology solutions (Wanda *et al.*, 2024). Combined, they indicate how various situations impose dissimilar priorities on various areas of agricultural advancement. As an illustration, whereas the Philippines considers systemic governance and infrastructure revolution something whose importance is equal, Indonesia considers innovation a priority.

The study conducted defines that agriculture is an important business with far-reaching effects beyond Southeast Asia. It is a futuristic organizational model, presented by Yakovlev and Stepanova (2020), that is essential in making economies, energy, and food in the country secure. The agribusiness that is big in rural economies of South Asia (crops, fisheries, dairy, and forestry) is crippled by issues such as financial crises, environmental degradation, and climate change (Sakib *et al.*, 2021). Borisova and Sorokina (2024) point out agro sector as weakened by economic uncertainty and the presence of geopolitical tensions in Russia. These are obstacles to funding, commerce and technology. These studies do not agree on the importance of the most important risk, but they provide that agriculture is vital to the development of society and economy (Sakib *et al.*, 2021 in the case of South Asia and Borisova and Sorokina, 2024 in Russia). There is a new school of thought that is emerging, which finds parallels between agribusiness, innovation, and entrepreneurship. Focusing on agripreneurs in Haryana, Jyoti *et al.* (2024) emphasize the fact that bringing Agri-agency suggestions implies enhanced profitability, capacity utilization, and social respectively. Focusing on agribusiness as an industry of opportunities, due to the dynamic response to both personal initiative and the situation, is contrasted to the years before it was defined in terms of production and commerce (Investopedia, n.d.; Camargos *et al.*, 2021).

This research proves that there is consensus and divergence on the definition and practice of agribusiness. Extrinsic threats, institutional vulnerabilities, and persistent inequalities are indicted by others, and its innovative capacity and integrative nature in the international global food systems are palpated by many experts. To address these controversies, this review is structured into four strands, which include: (1) the origins of the concept, (2) the emergence of agribusiness as a study, (3) its development throughout the 20th and 21st centuries, and (4) its reorientation in the contemporary era. In this sense, the review provides the focus on the fact that agriculture is an area of innovation and structural issues in the long term.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Origins of the Concept

The concept of Agribusiness originated with a systemic definition proposed by Davis (1955), who highlighted

the interrelationships among the supply of inputs, processing, marketing, and the production of agriculture. This framing was radically new in the period in which it was conceptionally formulated as it shifted the emphasis away not merely on farming, but on farming as a component of a greater industrial system. The necessity to create a systemic view also appeared to be emphasized by the postwar period, as more and more mechanisms were implemented in it, and more concerns were raised regarding food security. In such a way, the work of Davis laid the tone to consider agriculture as the system of values which are inter-related but not only a production sphere.

The system of view is supported by the fact that technological innovations created by the Green Revolution led to a significant increase in the size of agricultural production in the middle of the twentieth century. Extensive use of mechanization, chemical fertilizer and improved types of crops led to proximity of farmers to input and output processing firms. Many scholars started considering agribusiness as a solution to the underdeveloped countries in order to modernize their sectors. The opponents of this framing, on the other hand, existed. It has been questioned whether the broader impact of agribusiness-led development was more problematic since their preoccupation with productivity and the maximization of yield often came at the cost of social justice and environmental sustainability. Due to the process of globalization and markets liberalization, the agribusiness term expanded by the end of the century. The rise of the multinational companies in the seed, fertilizer, and processing business identified the systemic power relations implicit in the agricultural systems. The academics believe agribusiness is best perceived in the government, trade and corporate power. This opinion identified the opportunities of globally interlinked supply chains and its threats, including a stronger dependence, inequality, and concentration of power.

Agribusiness is not viewed as a system comprised of independently operating parts any more due to the new research, but as a system centered around the value chain with the creation of value going beyond the farm gate. The process of coordinating and making money has ventured to the post-harvest processing, labeling and retailing. Indicatively, to take an example, in their article, Barrett *et al.* (2019) reveal that processors and producers tend to engage in contractual relations that affect the access of farmers to markets and their livelihood. The shift contributes to the value of relations and structures in shaping the outcome of agribusiness, instead of concentrating on the mode of individual production. At the same time, the contributions of the contemporary opinions in this matter are the strength of the agribusiness to provoke the changes in countryside and labor market. Akuriba *et al.* (2020) note that agriculture can be used to revive the rural economy since it generates employment and increases the number of entrepreneurs. However, some other scholars also cautious that farmers who are

marginalized tend to be subject to institutional factors that make it difficult to exploit such opportunities, which only contributes to inequality. The conceptual history of agribusiness, therefore, has had a two-track history comprising on the one hand agribusiness has been acclaimed as a systemic integration, modernization, and rural change agent; on the other hand, agribusiness has been scolded as an instrument of inequality, corporate consolidation, and unequal growth.

Agribusiness As a Discipline

In the second half of the twentieth century, agribusiness came to mean more than an industrial concept, it became an academic discipline. The early programs in the Hungarian Royal Economics Academy and Harvard Business School had a solid agricultural economics and business management foundation (Hegyi, 2020). Agricultural business management, industry efficiency and relations formed significant focuses of these study subjects. With the rise of agribusiness as a social component, tertiary institutions had to change with a greater variety of degree programs.

Sustainability, entrepreneurship, and rural development began to feature in education in agricultural sector in the first half of the 2000s. Bairwa *et al.* (2015) claim that agribusiness graduates can be more effective in overcoming joblessness and promoting the advancement of the food system. A more interdisciplinary approach was created, which marked a departure of narrow economic descriptions. By so doing, agribusiness programs were marketed as a means of professional and personal development.

In spite of such expansion, the agenda about the scale and direction of agribusiness remains to be discussed. Both Weber (2017) and Hamilton (2016) caution that the focus on corporations poses a risk of marginalizing the family farms and exacerbating the state of inequality. It has been some time since agribusiness curricula have emphasized corporate globalization and competition and inadequately feature smallholder participation. Such fights demonstrate that the identity of the field is disputable.

Conversely, later sources introduce agribusiness as a solution to the current issues. As it is mentioned by Muhll *et al.* (2024), it is a key to shaping food systems resistant to the consequences of climate change and technological disruptions. Similarly, Mangarin and Almanzor (2024) emphasize the importance of introducing agribusiness to Philippine higher education and attracts interest in how the latter can facilitate food security and entrepreneurial skills. On these lines of thoughts agribusiness programs are adapting to the varying needs of the world.

Agribusiness has a neutral position between activism and reproach. One party view it as a corporate dominance and neoliberal expansion instrument. On the other hand, it is sold as a way of achieving a degree that would aid in food insecurity and sustainable development. This opposition underscores the reflective and the controversial nature of agribusiness scholarship.

Transformations Across the 20th and 21st Centuries

The twentieth century was marked by the industrial revolution, liberalization of trade and mechanization. Green revolution was a turning point of the ever-growing reliance on the international trade of commodities and new technologies by the agribusiness industry. The revolution in agricultural production and the global food supply chains was achieved through chemical contributions, high-yield types of crops and biotechnology. However, the distance between large farmers and small farmers was also increased during these changes (Alston & Pardey, 2020). The industry underwent significant change towards the end of the twentieth century through liberalization and vertical integration. The agribusiness enterprises got even more control when it came to supplying, processing, and retailing input. Although this integration did assist in streamlining, it also acted to centralize the corporate power. Critics claim that many smallholders were excluded in high-value marketplaces due to the quality requirements and other contractual obligations. These dynamics demonstrate both favorable and unfavorable things about agribusiness developments.

The new drivers of the new era are sustainability, ethical sourcing and transparency. The digital inventions that transformed production and traceability technologies comprised precision agriculture, robotics, and the blockchain (Kaundinya, 2024). Even though these technologies can optimize resources and maximize productivity, there are also key ethical concerns raised with regards to ownership of data and the autonomy of farmers. Therefore, technical advancement remains a good as well as an evil power.

It has shifted focus on the issues of the environment. It is not merely the benefits of agribusiness that the present century represents in the framework of climate change and resource efficiency rather than the previous century where the focus was on production with no regard to the ecological (Dimitri and Efland, 2020). The discussion is now dominated by green efforts, alternative sources of energy and ideas of the circular economy. It is argued, however, that sustainability initiatives driven by corporations often focus on branding, instead of the implementation of change.

This difference in dynamics is presented through case studies. Genetically modified (GM) soy beans led to the overall productivity of Argentina but also left the nation more susceptible to the environmental factors (Leguizamón, 2016). Agrarian Restructuring (2022) cites that transgenic crop in Paraguay has transformed the ownership and control of land by corporations. The ones shown here emphasize that agriculture is the cause of the growth in productivity as well as the increase in income gaps. That way, the disputes in the field are reflections of greater social problems regarding development, justice, and long life.

Reframing the Meaning of Agribusiness

Modern research has broadened the classical systemic

definition of agribusiness to incorporate such concepts like sustainability, value chains, and entrepreneurship (Bairwa *et al.*, 2014). Increasingly, scholars also view it, not as a fixed system of production, but as a multi-actor network that is dynamic. The development of food systems as the more closely interrelated with ecological, socioeconomic, and political processes follows.

Other writers view agribusiness in terms of a neoliberal agro-industrial complex that is dominated by corporations. Hamilton (2016) and Ioris (2016) claim that agribusiness is being a means of exclusion because of corporate integration and globalization. They highlight the issue that small-scale farmers are often marginalized and inequality is sanctified through policies concerned with liberalization and export orientation. This perspective does not regard agribusiness as a neutral economic system, but as a place of power politics.

Instead, the developmental paradigms focus on the ways agribusiness can drive industrialization, create job markets, and enhance growth to be inclusive (Sharma & Bhatt, n.d.; Yakovlev & Stepanova, 2020). These scholars believe that agribusiness can transform the rural regions and establish food security when appropriate policies are established. This view is particularly popular in the Global South, where agriculture is linked with the reduction of the poor and employment of the youth.

Institutional and educational rethinking bring into the discussion a lot more. As an example, Mangarin and Almanzor (2024) state that integrating agriculture in universities fosters entrepreneurship and contributes to the safety of food. As per such perceptions agribusiness cannot be noticed as a mere field in the economy, but rather as an instrument of development. In order to reach a happy medium, Romero Vargas *et al.* (2020) propose to consider agribusiness as a system of dynamics that combines production, innovation, and stakeholder participation.

The combined result of such reframing is the demonstration of the adaptability of agribusiness. It is exploitative and exclusive to some people and proponents argue that it can teach tolerance and strength as well. The case puts emphasis on the fact that the diverse nature of perspectives on development, sustainability, and social justice is the one that constructs the identity of agribusiness, and not a fixed concept.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

To provide a comprehensive synthesis of the evolution of the concept, discipline and application of agribusiness, a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) was utilized in this research. The most important academic databases that have been used in the search process of the relevant peer-reviewed journal articles, policy papers, and institutional reports of the living research published during 2015-2024 refer to Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar. To bank in the modern industry and policy views, other viable online and organizational articles were reviewed. The search terms were the following: rural development,

globalization, agribusiness, agricultural economics, sustainability, food systems, and digital agriculture.

To be included, the sources were supposed to talk about agricultural aspects in a systemic, socioeconomic or institutional context. Studies which had not involved such a thorough theoretical framework that explored the problems other than the production methods or technical features were not taken into account. To aid historical mapping and comparative interpreting in different geographies, the end body of literature has been grouped into four topics clusters which include beginnings of the idea, agribusiness as a scholar, changes in the twentieth and twenty-first century, and modern re-frames.

The methodological rigor, intellectual contribution, and the relevance to the development of agribusiness were given consideration on each of the selected sources. In order to locate emerging paradigms, unsolved problems and convergent trends, thematic analysis was conducted. An examination of regional case studies particularly in the Southeast Asia region showed development paths and situational ways. New topics such as digital transformation, climate adjustment, sustainability, and governance in global value chains were also given more attention.

Because the focus of the review has been placed on English-language and sources available in databases, there is a possibility that some valuable non-English or region-specific contributions are ignored. Nonetheless, the narrative strategy gave a balanced and critical synthesis as it offered an integrative approach of how agriculture as a production-based industry was converted to a globally based, digitally connected and sustainability-based organization.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

A shift towards production-based classic approaches to technology-centric, sustainability-based, value-integrated systems this is the general direction in agriculture as the literature review suggests. Agribusiness seems to be a result of the trend towards equating agricultural production to the level of technology and more environmentally-friendly management techniques. Digital and organizational connectedness over decades has enabled agribusiness to turn into the state of a supply chain as their live, breathing ecosystem, which unites producers, processors, retailers, and even consumers. The outcomes demonstrate that automation, precision farming, and blockchain traceability are only some of the examples of how the latest innovation is improving market efficiency, transparency, and production throughout the whole world. The digital transformation has emerged as a major competitive distinction by enhancing the resource optimization, demand forecasting, and supply chain connectivity. There are other issues that the research is also raising. These are, among others, the fact that rural areas have poor infrastructure, that traditional producers may be marginalized and that smallholders may be unexposed in terms of access to technology. Although digitization

makes the work more efficient than it was previously, these findings demonstrate that equal development can still need digital literacy and participatory governance. Agribusiness education and research have changed as well as the transformations that have occurred in the industrial sector. It is now common in schools to feature courses that unite disciplines like sustainability, entrepreneurship and economics. The change is an indication of increased consciousness of agribusiness as a system which has effects on society and environment other than the economy. The practitioners of the future will be equipped to deal with the complex and globalized agricultural environment with skills taught on the modern programs which put more emphasis on climate adaptation, innovation and ethical management. As per regional investigations, local institutional and economic environments influence the growth of agribusiness. The focus of emerging economies is on inclusive development, creation of jobs and community-based entrepreneurship as opposed to corporate integration, technical innovation and market sophistication that are prevalent in the developed world. Provided that the education, infrastructure and governance structures existing in the emerging countries are able to match the needs of the industry, then the sector can assist in reducing poverty, and empowering the rural regions. Agribusiness has a characteristic feature of a focus on sustainability. The environmental and social issues help to shift to the strategic direction of regenerative methods, resource effectiveness, and the idea of a circular economy. In order to bring a balance between profitability and environmental friendliness, most corporations are integrating sustainability into their business strategies. On the contrary, the study cautions against hollow sustainability assertions that emphasize on sign recognition as opposed to change. Agribusiness needs to be balanced with economic growth, environmental restoration and social inclusion so as to succeed in future. The research claims that there is a structural and ideological revolution taking place in Agribusiness. Going digital, sustaining innovation, and creating systemic reliance among stakeholders are becoming more eminent characteristics. It is important to note, though, that in order to be successful, new technology and ethical standards will have to be implemented with a cultural flexibility, governmental support, and ready institutions. The fact that the industry development contributes to profitability and resilience, equity in the global food system is instrumental in guaranteeing the long-term value of the modern agribusiness. It can be done only through the equilibrium between the technological progress and human ingenuity, all-encompassing engagement, and wise management.

CONCLUSION

Due to globalization and digitization, agribusiness ceases to be a systemic concept that is becoming more of a discipline. Although throughout the history of developing the discipline, the emphasis has been on

critique and advocacy, the origins in the area of technology modernization and the systematic integration remain obvious. Transformations that took place at the beginning of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries show that the emphasis shifted to digitalization and sustainability rather than on liberalization and productivity. Scholars agree that agriculture is important, however they do not agree on the impact of the industry in the society. It may be understood as the driver of innovation, sustainability and a competitive edge but the corporates would view it as an instrument to increase their corporate influence once more at the expense of the masses. It is the plurality of agribusiness that reveals the changing and unequal nature. The versatility of the concept is brought forward through reframing. Agribusiness remains a crucial topic in the discourse of food, society, and the environment whether considered as a neoliberal complex or a developmental tool or a system of education. It is constantly shifting in terms of its identity depending on various conceptualizations of the notions of development, equity, and ecology. The bioeconomy and circular agriculture are future models that can be used to strike a balance between efficiency and inclusion. However, they depend on a governmental system, which tries to abolish exclusion and encourages the equal opportunity in order to be effective. To ensure the field's future, it is critical that it strike the right balance between technical innovation, social justice, and ecological stewardship.

Ultimately, agribusiness is not only a system of Economics, it is a highly contested zone where all the issues of the environment, social and economic issues collide. The direction of its course will define the future of agricultural production and the 21st-century global endeavors towards achieving sustainable and fair development.

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