The Development of Farm Management Information System for Smallholder Farmers in Malaysia

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Abstract. This paper introduces the process of developing web application of farm management information system (FMIS) for smallholder farmers in Malaysia by using rapid application development (RAD) prototyping methodology in information system research design. The web application requirement determined through extraction process using physical data-driven design system from Malaysia Good Agriculture Practise (MyGAP) physical forms. Additionally, the functions and features of the system were determined through several questionnaires which were distributed to 209 smallholder farmers located in Taman Kekal Pengeluaran Makanan (TKPM) in Selangor. Selangor agricultural area together with smallholders farmers were chosen as respondent because Selangor is the highest internet penetration state in Malaysia. Subsequently, the design and analysis of FMIS are constructed by us including the database design, data flow design, system flow design and software development which was validated by two other experienced system analysts. The software development process were using PHP web development tool called Scriptcase version 8 which were taking less than 2 months to be completed. Furthermore, we also made a comparative study of an existing system available in the market to give additional competitive value to the new development of FMIS in Malaysia. The final developed FMIS is accessible through the official MyAgris website.

Keywords: Farm Management Information System, Prototype Development, Application Requirement, Good Agricultural Practice.

INTRODUCTION

Malaysia agriculture industry has been driven by rubber and oil palm sub-sector since before the Independence until these days. The high return of investment in the industry sub-sector made all small to large scale of farmers interested to involve in the cultivation. Since the industry is more a commodity, it is operated by large-scale farmer with high capital investment like Federal Land Development Authority (FELDA). Their structured agriculture business and partnership model with a set of policies and criteria in place for many small-scale farmers known as smallholder farmers that sometimes are family type of farmers with less and limited resources such capital and land [1]. Despite this, many smallholder farmers also cultivate rubber and oil palm by themselves not limited to the
sub-sector but move to less capital investment and risk such cash crop and agro-food sub-sector.

Under Agricultural Development Plan in Rancangan Malaysia ke-8 (RMK-8), the Malaysia government initiates many agriculture infrastructures across the country such Taman Kekal Pengeluaran Makanan (TKPM) and Taman Pertanian Moden (TPM). The initiatives allowed smallholder farmers to cultivate more crops and support the agricultural supply chain for ensuring the future national food security [2]. They begin to improve their livelihood and become more competitive under the plan. Nevertheless, Malaysian smallholder farmers still need shifting to new agriculture practice and paradigm in order to sustain in the dynamic agriculture environment challenge in context of farm management practices and systems. Nowadays, managing farm is not as easy as before and they are also need to comply with many new regulations such as Malaysia good agricultural practice (MyGAP).

One of the components in MyGAP is managing farm information. The farm information consist all the main farm activity logs such land preparation, seedling, irrigating, harvesting, and others [3]. Currently, the information is recorded manually in booklet. Furthermore, the information will be transferring into computer spreadsheet such Microsoft Excel in order to transform it into more valuable information. Managing information becomes more tedious once the data grow bigger. Due to this limitation, we proposed to the Malaysia smallholder farmers with Farm Management Information System (FMIS) to support their traditional way of keeping farm information that comply with MyGAP requirement.

FMIS is widely used by large scale of farmer in order to manage their farm information in daily operational. FMIS also known as 'system' or 'software' that enable large scale farmers to manage farm information and enhance their ability to make further decision in their business [4]. The system enabled them to analyze and transform big data into useful information for further decision making. In context of smallholder farmers, usually they have lesser data due to their small farm project. However, as the data growth, it is still useful for them to make future forecast and decision making. Furthermore, the system will assist them to improve their productivity and readiness before scale up their farm in future.

Existing System Comparative

There are several software companies offering FMIS in the market. In comparison, the software is not very well known in Malaysia. Most of the software are too robust and not suite to Malaysian smallholder farmers daily operation needs. We made initial comparison study from several existing software available in the market categories by simple system modules and features.
### TABLE 1: Farm Management Information System Comparison in the Market

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>MyAgris</th>
<th>FarmLogic</th>
<th>AgSquared</th>
<th>FarmWorks</th>
<th>FarmLogs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Web/Mobile Availability</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Device Accessibility</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Login Accountability</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>User Authority</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upload features</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MyGAP Reporting features</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Searching features</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysis features</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Objectives

The overall objectives of this research are to create MyAgris web application system known as Farm Management Information System (FMIS) for smallholder farmers in Malaysia. The system is considered as software to manage smallholder farmers to comply with MyGAP regulation in Malaysia. As general, the system development process can be categories as below:

1. To create database structure for storing farm information.
2. To create web application as user interface that will interact with database.
3. To ensure overall system is comply with the initial literature and software comparative study.

### MATERIALS AND METHODS

In order to propose FMIS to smallholder farmers in Malaysia, the system must easy to be used and not too complex because their age are more than 40 years old and less system literacy [5]. Therefore, we proposed new custom made and simple FMIS prototype called MyAgris that suitable to smallholder farmers use in daily farm operation and comply with MyGAP requirement. The system development was using rapid application development (RAD), one of the established information system methodology in research design [6]. Meanwhile, the system requirement and analysis was determined using questionnaires distributed to 209 farmers in Taman Kekal Pengeluaran Makanan (TKPM) in Selangor. Since most of the smallholder farmers literacy in information system is not high, we choose other IS expert in information technology and agricultural field to assist the development process in prototyping cycle. This will also increase the reliability and validity of the development process.
RAPID APPLICATION DEVELOPMENT (RAD)

RAD was introduced and evolved in software development process since early 90's. It is a development concept for a software prototype to be developed faster with high quality through several process of gathering information from user [7]. The methodology is also known as Joint Application Development (JAD) as it involves interaction with user while gathering the requirement, design and analysis [8]. It gives flexibility in development cycle to be revised and refined until the end of software development process. Recently, most of advance and complex system use RAD evolution method also known as Agile Development Methodology.

Analysis and Quick Requirement

The analysis and requirement gathering during MyAgris development process was using two main sources to achieve system development objective. The main source is from the MyGAP physical forms provided by Department of Agriculture Malaysia (DOA). The physical forms translated to become main database structured and design for storing information using data-driven model [9], [10]. The second source was using the information gathering from questionnaires distributed to 209 smallholder farmers from all TKPMs in Selangor. Furthermore, we also choose questionnaires distribution because it were less time consume, many respondents and much cheaper compare to interviewing [11]. The questionnaires was constructed with 10 simple and general questions gathered from literature review and initial existing FMIS comparative study in the market to ensure the smallholder farmers understand and able to answer it because most of them have lower information system literacy. Both sources were analyzed and validated together with the IS expertise selected from research agency consist by experienced software analyst and agriculture research officer.
There are many system development methodologies that may apply towards the
development process. However, it depends on the total size of the development projects
and resources that needed [7]. FutureFarm is a very big development project in Europe to
identify a suitable FMIS for large farmers with high resource availability. The project
utilizing soft system methodology with interviewing process to four different type of
farmers in Europe which focusing on managerial level in farm management [12]. In
addition, the method is suitable for the project with rich data gathering in qualitative way.
However, it consumed very high time and resources. In contrast, the method used for this
research is different which is more focusing on quantitative survey method for system
features determination and database modeling using data-driven model system extracted
from physical MyGAP forms.

**Design, Development and Refinement**

Most of the process will be in the cycle of repetition and refinement in software
development. Therefore, it is important for the users to involve during the development
of the software. The actual users which are the smallholder farmers is highly Information
Communication and Technology (ICT) literate but they are poorly IS literate [13]. For
that reason, we select other users to assist, evaluate and validate the system during
development process. The users were selected from research agency because they are
experiences and uses to IS. They are also having a background in software analysis and
agriculture development.
Data-driven Modeling

Data-driven model has been used during the development of database design. Subsequently, we also use it in system development during refinement of the database as well as the application system. We also used Scriptcase version 8 as software development tools to construct web the application system. Scriptcase is widely used as RAD tools in software development.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Features</th>
<th>Scriptcase</th>
<th>PhpStorm</th>
<th>NuSphere PhpED</th>
<th>RapidPHP Editor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Installation</td>
<td>• Installation program package from digital</td>
<td>• Installation program package from digital</td>
<td>• Installation program package from digital</td>
<td>• Installation program package from digital</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>downloaded program from internet</td>
<td>downloaded program from internet</td>
<td>downloaded program from internet</td>
<td>downloaded program from internet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Web/Mobile Design</td>
<td>• Support both</td>
<td>• Support both</td>
<td>• Support both</td>
<td>• Support both</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Cost</td>
<td>• Competitive</td>
<td>• Competitive</td>
<td>• Competitive</td>
<td>• Competitive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Application Development</td>
<td>• It is a fastest PHP IDE development</td>
<td>• Robust PHP IDE development</td>
<td>• Fast PHP IDE development</td>
<td>• Fast PHP IDE development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Include several application templates</td>
<td>• Include several Javascript code templates</td>
<td>• Include several CSS code templates</td>
<td>• Include several CSS code templates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Very less time spending to write code</td>
<td>• Really focus on coding.</td>
<td>• Less time is spent to write code. Focus on logical</td>
<td>• Less time is spent to write code. Focus on logical</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Focus on logical design.</td>
<td></td>
<td>design.</td>
<td>design.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Technical Support</td>
<td>• Included with the purchase</td>
<td>• Included with the purchase</td>
<td>• Included with the purchase</td>
<td>• Included with the purchase</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• 20-days free private support</td>
<td>• Use of support forum, knowledge base, and</td>
<td>• Use of support forum, knowledge base, email and</td>
<td>• Use of support forum, knowledge base, email and</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Use of support forum, knowledge base, blog,</td>
<td>ticketing system</td>
<td>ticketing system</td>
<td>ticketing system</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>and ticketing system</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>User Experience</td>
<td>• Suitable for beginner user</td>
<td>• Suitable for expert user</td>
<td>• Suitable for expert user</td>
<td>• Suitable for beginner to novice user</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Rapid Development</td>
<td>• The fastest IDE to develop application using</td>
<td>• Fast to develop an application with several</td>
<td>• Fast to develop an application with several type</td>
<td>• Fast to develop an application with several type</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>framework and data-driven model</td>
<td>type framework</td>
<td>framework</td>
<td>framework</td>
</tr>
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</table>
**System Modeling**

The system modeling in FMIS development was used to specify system flow (SF) and data flow design (DFD). The final SF design has been outlined by system analysts with the Scriptcase built-in feature and the result as shown below:

![System Flow Design Diagram](image)

**FIGURE 3**: MyAgris System Flow Design
From the first landing page, the MyAgris will show the login page for the system. From there, users may login into the system using their username and password. They may also retrieve their forgotten password using their email address. Besides that, they are also able to make new user registration whereby they will be later identified as farm owner or manager in the system. The registration will use user email for authentication and activation before using the system as security purposes. After the activation, user will able to login and use the system as usual.

From the login page, successful user login will be redirected to the system dashboard base on the system role checking in the system. There are only two roles available in the system which is the farm manager and farm worker. Farm worker role have limitation features while using the system. Meanwhile, the unsuccessful login will be redirect back to the main login page.

From the main dashboard, only farm manager role able to add new users and farms as well as projects in the system. They are able to add farm workers and assign them to their existing farms and projects created. Meanwhile, farm workers are allowed to edit and insert data in existing farm and project accounts created by their farm manager. All farms and projects are exclusive for each farm managers and farm workers account. Furthermore, in each of sub-modules, they are able to upload image, search information, analysis for decision making and generate report which comply with MyGAP.

![MyAgris login page](image)

**FIGURE 4:** MyAgris login page

**Testing and Implementation**

The system test has been done using User Acceptance Test (UAT) by the same selected user during development. The application ported into the official website at [http://www.myagris.com](http://www.myagris.com). The result is accepted and the system sufficient for the actual testing in production environment with the actual users which are the smallholder farmers after series of training.
Contribution and Research Limitations

The contribution of this research paper is to produce a new development of FMIS for smallholder farmers in Malaysia. The research used RAD as the IS development methodology due to the time constraints and decided to give more flexibility during the development process. Despite of the result of the actual system developed, the study should extend up to the acceptance of the system developed and impact evaluation of the system after fully implementation.

CONCLUSION

This paper attempts to propose an essential process of FMIS development using RAD methodology and several software tools. The process and development of FMIS has been stated in this paper and the final system has been implemented. The final system need to be further tested and verified by actual users especially the smallholder farmers. The system is useful for future integration with precision agriculture, farm automation and mechanization.

The actual system developed in this study is accessible throughout the website http://www.myagris.com. It allowed any farmers in Malaysia to register and use the system for storing farm information followed with MyGAP compliance. Furthermore, the system also should be extended to be used by other type of users such DOA's officer, researchers and other agencies to make use the information stored in the system.

This research has shown the benefit of using dedicated information system development methodologies and several software tools produced new FMIS for smallholder farmers compared to other system analysis and design methods. It has been essential guide to derive more technology in agriculture which improved nation economic scale in the future.

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REFERENCES


