P-ISSN: 0119-3058
E-ISSN: 2945-4093

The Vector: International Journal of Emerging Science, Technology and Management
Volume 34, Issue 1, January - December 2025

The Dynamics of Agricultural Land Use Cover Change Using Agricultural Carrying Capacity: The Case of Magsingal, Ilocos Sur

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ABSTRACT

Amid intensifying development pressures and shifting socio-economic landscapes, this study provides a critical assessment of how changing land-use patterns are reshaping the agricultural sustainability and long-term food and crop security in Magsingal, Ilocos Sur. This study explores the evolving dynamics of agricultural land use in Magsingal, Ilocos Sur, focusing on its Agricultural Carrying Capacity (ACC). Employing a mixed-methods approach with expert interviews and survey data, it investigates pressures on farmlands, including urbanization, economic factors, and demographic shifts. Findings indicate a decline in Magsingal's ACC from 0.56 hectares per farmer in 2021 to 0.52 hectares in 2023, reflecting increasing land fragmentation and challenges to farming sustainability. This trend mirrors national land fragmentation patterns observed in the 2012 Census of Agriculture. Key drivers of land-use change include urban sprawl, infrastructure development, and conversions to residential and commercial uses. Recommendations include integrating ACC assessments into local land use planning, promoting regular land evaluations, and fostering community engagement in decision-making. The study advocates for policies that secure land tenure, enhance farming practices, and balance urban expansion with agricultural preservation, ultimately promoting long-term agricultural sustainability and food security in Magsingal.

Keywords: *Agricultural Carrying Capacity, Land Use Change, Urbanization, Food Security, Sustainable Agriculture, Magsingal*

INTRODUCTION

Agricultural land is the backbone of global food security and rural livelihoods, particularly in developing nations where agriculture sustains both employment and local economies. Globally, however, the conversion of agricultural land into non-agricultural uses, such as urban development, industrial complexes, and infrastructure projects, has emerged as a pressing concern (Ariani & Susilo, 2021; FAO, 2017). The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO, 2017) estimates that approximately 33 million hectares of agricultural land are lost each year worldwide, driven by urban sprawl, industrialization, and changing land-use policies. This phenomenon poses significant risks to global food security, as the shrinking availability of fertile land reduces nations' capacity to produce sufficient food for growing populations, intensifying reliance on food imports and global supply chains. Environmental impacts are equally significant, including soil degradation, deforestation, biodiversity loss, and increased greenhouse gas emissions, all of which compromise the sustainability of agricultural systems (Vogt et al., 2019; Liu et al., 2016). Socioeconomic consequences, such as rural unemployment and migration to urban centers, further exacerbate inequality and threaten social stability in both developed and developing countries (Hussain et al., 2020).

At the national level, the Philippines mirrors these global trends, facing a steady decline in agricultural land due to rapid urbanization, population growth, and economic pressures (PSA, 2020; David et al., 2019). Between 2003 and 2018, the country reportedly lost more than 250,000 hectares of agricultural land, primarily to residential, commercial, and industrial development (Budiarto & Suroso, 2020). This loss has resulted in reduced local food production, increased dependence on imports for staple commodities such as rice and corn, and diminished availability of fertile land for farming. Beyond economic consequences, land conversion has led to environmental degradation, including ecosystem disruption, soil erosion, and water resource contamination due to improper land management practices (David et al., 2019; Martinez et al., 2018). Socially, the reduction of agricultural land destabilizes rural communities, forcing farmers to abandon traditional livelihoods and migrate to urban areas in search of alternative employment, thereby creating labor shortages in agricultural zones and altering demographic patterns (Vogt et al., 2019).

Locally, the municipality of Magsingal in Ilocos Sur exemplifies the complex interplay between agricultural land preservation and developmental pressures. As a predominantly agricultural community, Magsingal faces the challenges of rapid industrialization and unregulated land subdivision, which threaten the integrity of its farmland. Uncontrolled sale and conversion of parcel lots without proper permits have accelerated urban expansion, often outpacing municipal planning efforts and exposing critical gaps in sustainable land-use management (Riebsame et al., 1994). The local scenario reflects broader national concerns, highlighting the urgent need for integrated policies that balance economic growth with environmental protection and food security. Environmental degradation in the area, including declining soil fertility and habitat loss, compounds the socio-economic vulnerabilities of farming households, reinforcing the need for proactive and community-oriented approaches to land management.

The study is anchored in the Carrying Capacity Theory, which defines the maximum population an ecosystem can support sustainably without degrading its resources (Reynolds & Hastings, 2018). In agricultural contexts, Agricultural Carrying Capacity (ACC) evaluates the threshold at which farmland can meet human demands without compromising ecological balance (Kuznetsov & Walmsley, 2020). Land conversion for urban infrastructure directly reduces the arable land available, intensifying pressure on remaining areas and potentially leading to overexploitation, soil degradation, and diminished productivity (Hussain et al., 2020). Population growth and economic pressures exacerbate these dynamics, prompting unsustainable farming practices and further straining agricultural resources (FAO,

P-ISSN: 0119-3058
E-ISSN: 2945-4093

The Vector: International Journal of Emerging Science, Technology and Management
Volume 34, Issue 1, January - December 2025

2017). Socioeconomic implications of reduced ACC include livelihood loss, increased dependency on imported food, and exacerbation of rural poverty, while environmental consequences encompass habitat destruction, biodiversity loss, and higher carbon emissions (Vogt et al., 2019). Despite these challenges, implementing sustainable land management practices, such as zoning regulations, agroforestry, and farmland preservation incentives, can enhance ACC by balancing development needs and environmental stewardship (Liu et al., 2016). In Magsingal, applying ACC principles provides a framework to assess the sustainable limits of agricultural land use, guiding policymakers, farmers, and local stakeholders in planning for long-term food security and ecosystem resilience.

This study addresses these gaps by exploring the underlying factors driving agricultural land use cover change in Magsingal and its implications for Agricultural Carrying Capacity (ACC). It aims to strengthen land reclassification processes to align with local and national policies, examine the benefits and drawbacks of land use conversion, and address challenges encountered throughout the process.

Objectives of the Study

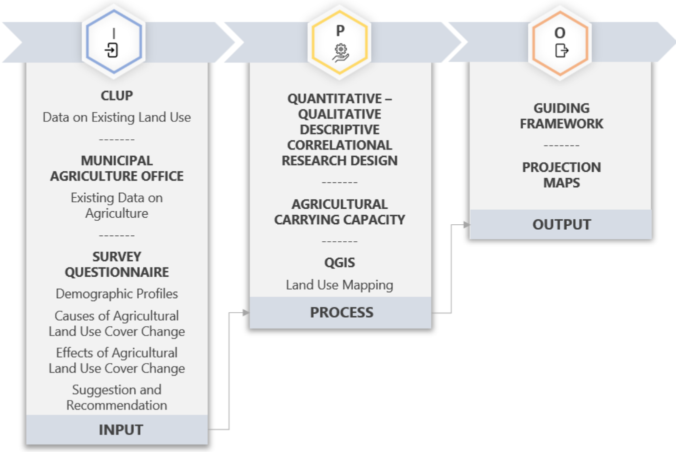
The study sought to answer the following: (1) Determine the profile of the respondents; (2) Identify the driving factors behind agricultural land cover change leading to land use conversion in Magsingal, Ilocos Sur; (3) Determine the dynamics of agricultural land use cover change via agricultural carrying capacity and (4) Develop a guiding framework aimed at mitigating the impact of agricultural land use cover change in Magsingal, Ilocos Sur.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design. This study used a descriptive-correlational mixed-methods approach to examine the dynamics of agricultural land-use change in Magsingal, Ilocos Sur. Guided by the Input-Process-Output (IPO) model, the research combined existing land use data from the CLUP (2017–2027), agricultural records from the Municipal Agriculture Office, and primary data gathered through survey questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. The input stage included information on land use, agricultural production, demographic profiles, and factors influencing land use change, such as urbanization, economic conditions, policies, technology, environmental issues, cultural and social shifts, and land tenure concerns. In the process stage, both quantitative and qualitative analyses were applied to examine relationships between these factors and agricultural carrying capacity, supported by GIS-based spatial analysis and ACC computations. The study produced a guiding framework for agricultural carrying capacity and projection maps that can support evidence-based planning and sustainable land management in the municipality.

P-ISSN: 0119-3058
E-ISSN: 2945-4093

Figure 1
Research Framework



Participants of the Study. The study used stratified random sampling. Participants included farmers and residents of Magsingal, Ilocos Sur, who were present during data collection and provided informed consent. Additionally, semi-structured interviews were conducted with six agricultural experts from the local government, Assessors' Office, Department of Agriculture, DENR, DAR, and NIA, providing diverse insights.

Research Instrument. The study utilized a mixed-methods approach integrating quantitative, qualitative, and spatial data. For the quantitative component, self-administered questionnaires served as the primary research instrument. The tool consisted of three parts: Part 1 gathered the respondents' demographic profiles, including age, gender, number of children, monthly income, total agricultural land area, and types of crops cultivated. Part 2 measured the perceived causes of agricultural land use cover change using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree), while Part 3 assessed the effects of agricultural land use cover change using the same scale. Quantitative data were analyzed through frequency counts, percentages, and weighted mean computations. The study also employed a qualitative component, in which semi-structured interviews with agricultural experts were conducted to gain deeper insights into the dynamics and implications of land-use changes. To complement these datasets, spatial data derived from satellite imagery and Geographic Information Systems (GIS) were used to identify patterns and trends in agricultural land-use cover change. Lastly, the research incorporated an Agricultural Carrying Capacity (ACC) analysis, computed using the formula: $ACC=X/K$, where X = Total of Crops Per Capita (Metric Tons / Farmer) and K = Total Area of Land for Self-Sufficiency (Metric Tons / Hectare). This calculation

P-ISSN: 0119-3058
E-ISSN: 2945-4093

The Vector: International Journal of Emerging Science, Technology and Management
Volume 34, Issue 1, January - December 2025

provided an estimate of the land's capacity to sustain agricultural productivity under existing conditions.

Data Gathering Procedure. The procedure involved clarifying research goals, reviewing existing literature, selecting the study area, combining survey questionnaires with interviews, establishing variables, and validating collected data through cross-referencing with secondary sources and GIS analysis. The study prioritized participant consent, privacy, and confidentiality. It ensured fairness and equitable representation, accurately presented findings, respected indigenous knowledge, and advocated for sustainable land use policies. Ethical approval was secured from relevant review boards.

Data Analysis. Data analysis used statistical methods and GIS software to identify patterns and trends, concluding with the synthesis and presentation of findings, including ACC projections and a guiding framework. Data compilation, summary statistics (means, medians, standard deviations), graphical representations (maps), and GIS analysis were employed to interpret findings in line with the study's objectives.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

1. Profile of the Respondents

The demographic profile (n=364) revealed that a significant majority of respondents (42.9%, 156 people) were aged 50 years or older, indicating an aging farming population with extensive experience. Younger farmers (18-29 years) were underrepresented (10.4%, 38 people), suggesting a potential challenge in intergenerational knowledge transfer and labor for long-term agricultural sustainability. The agricultural sector showed a clear male dominance (71.7% male, 28.3% female), possibly reflecting traditional gender roles. Family sizes tended to be moderate, with 26.4% having two children, likely influenced by financial strains in agricultural livelihoods. Most respondents (58.9%, 214 people) worked on small land areas (5,000 sqm and below), indicating a prevalence of small-scale or subsistence farming, while only a small fraction (0.6%, three people) operated on large areas (50,000 sqm and above). All respondents (100%) were rice producers, with tobacco (55.5%) and corn (51.7%) also being significant crops.

2. Driving factors behind agricultural land cover change leading to land use conversion

Table 1
Overall Level of Degree of Agreement on Agricultural Land Cover Change leading to Land Use Conversion

DRIVING FACTORS	WEIGHTED MEAN	OVERALL MEAN
Urbanization	4.16	3.95
Economic Factors	3.86	3.78
Government Policies	3.81	3.74
Technological Advancements	4.24	4.03
Environmental Factors	4.02	3.89
Social and Cultural Growth	3.90	3.82
Land Tenure Issues	3.90	3.73

The overall mean rating for the causes of agricultural land-use cover change was 3.85 ("Agree"), indicating a collective acknowledgment of the factors influencing agricultural sustainability. This finding aligns with studies showing that agricultural land conversion is driven by multifaceted pressures encompassing urbanization, economic, governmental, technological, environmental, social, and land tenure factors (Lambin & Geist, 2006; Seto et al., 2012).

With an overall mean rating of 3.95 ("Agree"), urbanization was identified as a critical driver. The development of transportation networks was perceived as the most influential factor, facilitating urban expansion and infrastructure. This is consistent with global trends where urban sprawl, fueled by road construction and connectivity improvements, often encroaches on prime agricultural lands (Bren d'Amour et al., 2017; Irwin, 2002).

Economic factors had an overall mean rating of 3.78 ("Agree"), with the availability of financing for development projects being the highest-rated item. The result suggests that accessible loans and funding incentivize land conversion, which supports prior research indicating that economic opportunities and financial support play a central role in farmers' land-use decisions (FAO, 2017; Liu et al., 2020).

Government policies had an overall mean rating of 3.74 ("Agree"), and comprehensive land-use plans prioritizing urban development were considered the most impactful. This mirrors findings from other studies, which emphasize that policy frameworks and zoning regulations significantly influence land-use patterns, often tipping the balance between urban growth and agricultural preservation (Verburg et al., 2013; Huang et al., 2021).

Technological advancements had a strong overall mean rating of 4.03 ("Agree"), with the adoption of automated machinery highlighted as most beneficial. This finding corresponds with literature documenting how mechanization enhances productivity and operational efficiency, sometimes encouraging intensification that reduces the need for expansion, yet can also facilitate land conversion (Pingali, 2012; van Vliet et al., 2015).

Environmental factors had an overall mean rating of 3.89 ("Agree"), with changes in temperature and precipitation patterns identified as highly disruptive to farming systems. These observations reflect broader research that emphasizes the sensitivity of agriculture to climate variability and the resultant pressures on land-use decisions (IPCC, 2019; Thornton et al., 2017).

Social and cultural factors had an overall mean rating of 3.82 ("Agree"), with movements advocating for sustainable living and urban green spaces seen as most influential in shaping local government priorities. This aligns with studies highlighting how societal values and community advocacy increasingly inform land management policies and conservation efforts (Pretty, 2008; Liu et al., 2014).

Land tenure issues had an overall mean rating of 3.73 ("Agree"), with farmers' difficulty in accessing financing due to insecure land tenure being the highest-rated item. This underscores its critical role in maintaining agricultural productivity and aligns with global evidence linking secure land tenure with sustainable farming practices and investment incentives (Deininger et al., 2011; FAO, 2018).

The overall mean rating for the effects of agricultural land use cover change was 3.84 ("Agree"), indicating consistent recognition of these impacts. Respondents' awareness of environmental, economic, and social consequences mirrors findings from studies documenting the broad ramifications of land conversion, including biodiversity loss, soil degradation, and socio-economic disruptions (Lambin et al., 2003; Meyfroidt et al., 2013). This collective acknowledgment highlights the importance of integrated land use planning and sustainable agricultural policies.

3. Dynamics of Agricultural Land Use Cover Change Via Agricultural Carrying Capacity

As shown in Table 2, ACC values declined from 0.56 Ha/Farmer in 2021 to 0.52 Ha/Farmer in 2023, indicating increasing pressure on the agricultural system and intensifying land fragmentation. Although productivity levels remained relatively stable, even minor fluctuations exerted a substantial impact on ACC, underscoring the system's sensitivity to changes in yield, land availability, and farmer capacity.

P-ISSN: 0119-3058
E-ISSN: 2945-4093

This observed decline is consistent with long-term national patterns. The 2012 Census of Agriculture reported a decreasing average farm size of 1.29 hectares (PSA, 2012), and more recent data show continued shrinkage due to demographic growth, inheritance patterns, and expanding non-agricultural land uses (Briones & Aguilar, 2020). According to the Philippine Development Plan 2023–2028, farmland subdivision and conversion remain among the major pressures undermining agricultural productivity (NEDA, 2022).

International findings mirror these trends. FAO (2021) notes that farm fragmentation in developing countries reduces economies of scale, increases production costs, and limits the adoption of modern technologies. Studies by Tan et al. (2021) and Manjunatha et al. (2013) similarly emphasize that small and fragmented farms often experience lower output efficiency, reduced mechanization, and weaker resilience to climate variability—factors that directly influence carrying capacity. In Southeast Asia, agricultural carrying capacity has been shown to decline when population growth outpaces land availability and technological adoption (Huong et al., 2019; Nguyen & Warr, 2020).

At the local level, land conversion driven by urbanization continues to intensify, particularly in peri-urban municipalities of Northern Luzon. Research by Dacumos (2020) and Ramirez et al. (2022) attributes the decline in agricultural land size in Ilocos provinces to residential expansion, economic diversification, and infrastructure development. These conditions closely align with the trends observed in Magsingal, strengthening the argument that declining ACC is a manifestation of broader regional land-use transformations.

Collectively, the literature reinforces the implication of the present findings: decreasing ACC is not only a localized occurrence but part of a broader systemic challenge affecting agricultural sustainability in the Philippines and elsewhere. This further highlights the urgency of interventions to optimize land use, improve productivity, and enhance farmers' adaptive capacity to ensure long-term food security.

Table 2

Computed Agricultural Carrying Capacity

Year	Total Number of Farmers	Rice		Tobacco		Corn		x	K	ACC	TOTAL ACC (Ha)
		Land Area (Ha.)	Metric Tons	Land Area (Ha.)	Metric Tons	Land Area (Ha.)	Metric Tons	(MT / Farmer)	(MT/Ha.)	(Ha. / Farmer)	
2021	3586	3253	14661.0	1328.73	2125.97	1287	8028.3	6.92	12.34	0.56	2010.16
2022	3703	3253	15312.5	1562.01	2508.82	1242	8612.8	7.14	13.25	0.54	1995.33
2023	3768	3253	17891.5	1636.82	2618.91	786.3	4324.65	6.59	12.60	0.52	1971.04

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E-ISSN: 2945-4093

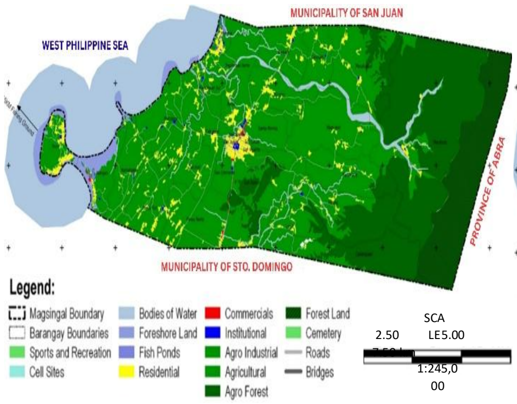
4. Guiding Framework for mitigating the impact of agricultural land use cover change

Figure 2, land use maps that visually illustrate the ongoing conversion of agricultural land. The Magsingal General Land Use Map in 2017 shows significant agricultural areas, but projections for 2024 and 2031 predict increasing urban sprawl.

Figure 2

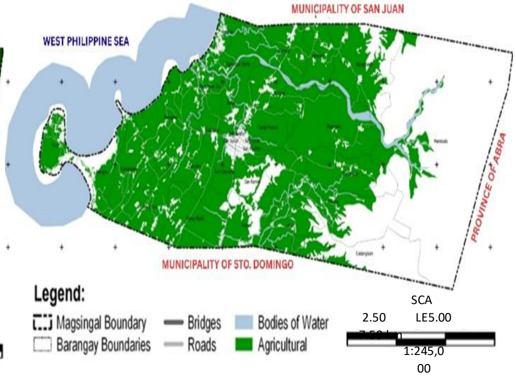
Land Use Maps and Projections

The Magsingal General Land Use Map in 2017



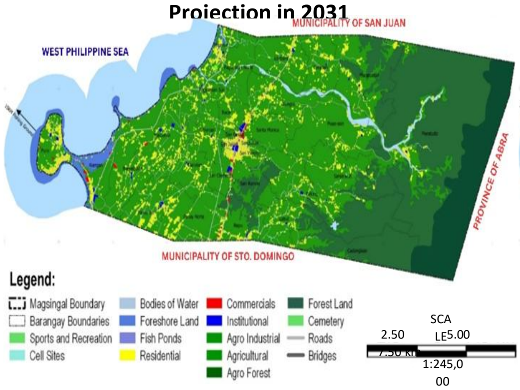
Source: CLUP 2017-2027 of Magsingal, Ilocos Sur

Existing General Map Agricultural Land in 2017-2027



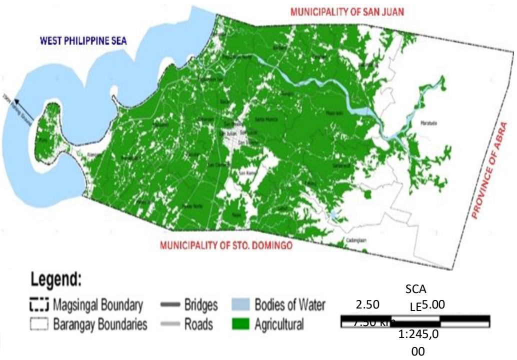
Note: Map adapted from Magsingal CLUP 2017-2027

Uncontrolled Land Use Cover Change Map Projection in 2031



Sources: Data Gathered from Assessor's Office, Engineering Office, MPDC Office, DSWD Office, DA Office and Google Earth.

Projected Agricultural Land Map in 2031



Note: A simulated projection map for the year 2031 illustrates predicted land use patterns, highlighting changes in agricultural land based on current trends.

Table 3 indicates that residential areas are projected to grow by 4.08% and commercial by 14.34% from 2017-2031, while agriculture is projected to decline by 0.73% and agro-industry by -5.97%. This shift emphasizes the growing competition for space and the increasing pressure on agricultural systems.

P-ISSN: 0119-3058
E-ISSN: 2945-4093

These maps, integrated with ACC assessments, are crucial for tracking land conversion and assessing long-term effects on food security (Mendoza & Cruz, 2021). They reveal how metropolitan, industrial, commercial, and infrastructure expansions compete for limited agricultural space (Lopez & Greenfield, 2020), enabling planners to visualize growth and identify areas where conversion reduces sustainable farming capacity (Silva et al., 2021). Early detection of these patterns can inform zoning laws to protect high-value agricultural areas, steer urban development away from productive land, and support the sustainability of farming systems (Jones et al., 2019).

Table 3
The General Land Use Growth Rate Projection

General Land Use in Hectare				Growth Rate in Percent		
Category	**2017**	**2024**	**2031**	**2017-2024**	**2024-2031**	**2017-2031**
Residential	355.28	408.82	470.08	2.03	2.01	4.08
Commercial	7.21	11.26	18.41	6.58	7.27	14.34
Institutional	21.08	25.99	32.71	3.04	3.34	6.48
Cemetery	4.80	5.04	5.27	0.69	0.66	1.36
Sports & Recreation	1.44	2.65	5.07	9.10	9.73	19.71
Cell Sites	0.12	0.24	0.48	10.10	10.54	21.71
Bodies of Water	127.57	142.51	157.29	1.59	1.42	3.04
Foreshore	2.22	3.17	4.44	5.20	4.94	10.39
Fishpond	13.57	13.27	13.01	-0.32	-0.28	-0.60
Agro-Industrial	8.71	7.06	5.66	-2.95	-3.11	-5.97
Agriculture	5,003.15	4,904.05	4,752.66	-0.29	-0.45	-0.73
Agro-Forest	2,293.97	2,272.72	2,248.96	-0.13	-0.15	-0.28
Forest Land	878.41	873.65	866.94	-0.08	-0.11	-0.19
Roads/Bridges	72.52	119.64	209.06	7.41	8.30	16.33
	8,790.05	8,790.05	8,790.05			

Data Source: CLUP 2017-2027

P-ISSN: 0119-3058
E-ISSN: 2945-4093

The Vector: International Journal of Emerging Science, Technology and Management
Volume 34, Issue 1, January - December 2025

The study's findings reveal a complex interplay of factors driving agricultural land use change in Magsingal, primarily influenced by urbanization and economic growth. The consistent transformation of agricultural areas into residential, commercial, and infrastructural uses, particularly near highways and business districts, highlights how strategic location dictates land value and demand. This trend significantly impacts the long-term sustainability of agriculture, which remains vital for livelihoods and food security in the region.

Economic pressures emerge as a primary catalyst for land conversion. Landowners frequently sell or repurpose agricultural property for immediate financial gain, driven by perceived higher returns from real estate or industrial ventures (WM = 3.73). This is often to cover urgent expenses or to capitalize on rising property values facilitated by accessible financing for development projects (WM = 3.86). While this generates short-term economic benefits—attracting investment, increasing property values, and creating jobs—it simultaneously diminishes agricultural productivity, disrupts local food supply chains, and increases reliance on imported food.

Government policies play a pivotal role, with comprehensive land-use plans prioritizing urban development (WM = 3.81), thereby significantly influencing land allocation. However, inconsistencies in the uniform application of zoning laws (WM = 3.64) remain a concern. Technological advancements, particularly mechanization (WM = 4.24), are considered transformative, improving agricultural efficiency and potentially reducing the land required for production. Environmental factors like changing temperature and precipitation patterns (WM = 4.02) disrupt farming, highlighting the vulnerability of agriculture to climate variability. Social and cultural factors, such as movements advocating for green spaces (WM = 3.90), influence development priorities. Lastly, insecure land tenure (WM = 3.90) acts as a significant barrier to long-term agricultural investments, often forcing farmers to convert land for immediate financial returns.

The declining ACC from 0.56 Ha/Farmer in 2021 to 0.52 Ha/Farmer in 2023 further underscores the escalating pressure on agricultural systems. This decline, coupled with an aging farming population and limited financial resources, leads to labor shortages and compromised land productivity. The correlation analysis reveals that respondents with fewer children and lower monthly incomes perceive greater negative effects, highlighting the socioeconomic vulnerabilities exacerbated by land use changes.

The experts' responses confirmed these multifaceted challenges, stressing the need for stricter enforcement of regulations, participatory community engagement, and sustainable development strategies. While land conversion offers certain immediate benefits, its long-term environmental consequences (soil erosion,

P-ISSN: 0119-3058
E-ISSN: 2945-4093

biodiversity loss, greenhouse gas emissions) and social impacts (displacement of farmers, loss of rural identity, economic inequality) are profound. Integrating land-use maps and ACC assessments into planning processes is crucial for anticipating future challenges and ensuring that urbanization does not diminish agricultural output, thereby safeguarding long-term food security and sustainable development in Magsingal.

CONCLUSION

This study, using a mixed-methods IPO model, examined agricultural land use conversion and its effects on Agricultural Carrying Capacity (ACC) in Magsingal, Ilocos Sur. The Input data, encompassing demographic profiles and various drivers of land conversion (urbanization, economic factors, government policies, technological advancements, environmental factors, social/cultural growth, and land tenure issues), provided a comprehensive understanding of the forces influencing agricultural systems. The Process phase, employing a quantitative-qualitative descriptive correlational design, revealed critical themes. An aging farming population and limited youth engagement contributed to labor shortages and hindered the adoption of innovative practices, impacting ACC. Gender disparities in land ownership further constrained equitable resource management. Economic constraints, such as small, fragmented landholdings and tenancy arrangements, compelled conversions for short-term financial relief, thus diminishing ACC. Urbanization, driven by infrastructure development and urban sprawl, directly reduced the availability of agricultural land. Financial support, if poorly structured, incentivized unsustainable conversion. Government policies were pivotal, necessitating coordination between national and local levels to balance urban growth with agricultural preservation. Technological adoption, particularly mechanization, emerged as a transformative factor for productivity. Environmental factors such as climate variability disrupted farming, underscoring the need for adaptive strategies. Social and cultural factors influenced land-use decisions through initiatives that promoted sustainable practices. Land tenure insecurity impeded long-term farming investments, further stressing ACC. The Output of this study emphasizes the formulation of policies, projection maps, and strategic recommendations to enhance ACC. Findings underscore the interdependence of demographic, economic, environmental, and policy-related factors in land-use conversion. A multifaceted strategy addressing labor dynamics, financial mechanisms, technological innovation, and climate resilience is essential for sustainable land use. The research concludes that a guiding framework is needed to balance economic expansion and urbanization while prioritizing agricultural sustainability, providing a clear roadmap to address land-use conversion challenges and ensure the long-term viability of agricultural systems in Magsingal.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommends strengthening agricultural land use management in Magsingal, Ilocos Sur, by integrating Agricultural Carrying Capacity (ACC) into local planning, enforcing stricter policies on land conversion, and promoting sustainable farming. It highlights the need to regularly assess agricultural lands, protect high-value areas, and use ACC data to guide zoning and land use decisions. The recommendations also call for evidence-based policies developed with broad stakeholder involvement, financial and technical support for farmers, and stronger land tenure systems. Long-term planning tools, such as land-use projections, maps, and scenario analyses, should be used alongside ACC assessments to identify risks and prioritize protection. Finally, the study emphasizes the development of sustainable land use guidelines, regular monitoring, community engagement, and collaborative planning to ensure food security, protect farmland, and promote resilient, sustainable agricultural development in the municipality.

ETHICAL STATEMENT

This study adhered to rigorous ethical standards throughout its conduct. All participants provided informed consent, ensuring their voluntary involvement without coercion. The privacy and confidentiality of the collected data were strictly maintained, with anonymity ensured through numerical identification. Fairness and equitable representation of diverse socio-economic backgrounds were ensured. Findings are presented accurately and truthfully, without manipulation or distortion. Traditional knowledge related to land use and conservation practices was acknowledged and respected. The research advocates for policies that promote sustainable land-use practices based on evidence. Ethical approval was secured from the Saint Louis University – Research Ethics Committee (SLU-REC), and continuous ethical review was conducted throughout the research process.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to extend my sincere appreciation to my thesis adviser, Ar. Lord Byron F. Gonzales, D.Eng., for his invaluable guidance, support, and encouragement throughout this journey, which has been crucial in refining my work and elevating its quality. My gratitude also goes to my thesis panels, Arch. Melissa Ann Patano, Arch. Henry C. Desierto, and Arch. Raymund P. Queypo, for their time, expertise, and valuable insights, and to the School of Advanced Studies, Saint Louis University, headed by Dr. Faridah Kristi C. Wetherick and Dr. Marcelino Lunag Jr., for their guidance and dedication. I am also deeply grateful to the Local Government Officials of Magsingal, headed by Hon. Alrico A. Favis, for providing essential data, resources, and insights. Special thanks to Dr. Tirso Tactay for his expertise in statistical methods, and to Arch. Estrelita Rugnao, Arch. Ludivina Lozano and Dr. Wilberto

Tabutol for their professional guidance. Finally, I thank my friends for their support, and Wayne Guzman for his dedicated help.

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