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Kulliyyah of Economics and Management Sciences

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Correspondence

Editor-in-Chief

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P.O. Box 10, 50728 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Website: <https://journals.iium.edu.my/ijcsm/index.php/jcsm>

Email Editor-in-Chief: suhaimims@iium.edu.my

Email Editor: nkamariahwahid@iium.edu.my

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Editorial Information

Editors

Editor-in-chief

Prof Dr Suhaimi Mhd Sarif
Department of Business Administration
Kulliyyah of Economics and Management Sciences
International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM).
P.O. Box 10, 50728 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7141-572X>

Editor

Dr Nur Kamariah Abdul Wahid
Department of Business Administration
Kulliyyah of Economics and Management Sciences
International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM).
P.O. Box 10, 50728 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6476-2803>

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Kulliyyah of Economics and Management
Sciences
International Islamic University Malaysia

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CV Berkah Agung Farm: Growing with Farmers, Blessing the Nation, and Sustaining the Light of Knowledge

Suhaimi Mhd Sarif

Kulliyyah of Economics and Management Sciences

International Islamic University Malaysia

Email: albanjari@yahoo.com

Rakhmad Agung Hidayatullah

CV Agung Grafika

Dusun III, Singopuran, Kec. Kartasura, Kab. Sukoharjo Jawa Tengah 57164, Indonesia

Email: rakhmadagunghidayatullah@gmail.com

Yayan Firmansah

Faculty of Economics and Management

University of Darussalam (UNIDA) Gontor

Jl. Raya Siman No.Km. 5, Dusun I, Demangan, Kec. Siman, Kabupaten Ponorogo, Jawa Timur 63471, Indonesia

Email: yayanf@unida.gontor.ac.id

Abstract

This teaching case examines how CV Berkah Agung Farm transformed a rural agribusiness venture into an integrated enterprise that combines commercial sustainability, farmer empowerment, youth retention, and Islamic values. Located in Desa Beruk, Karanganyar, Indonesia, the company was established to address persistent rural youth migration despite abundant agricultural resources. Rather than pursuing conventional profit maximisation, the founders developed a partnership-based business model that preserved farmers' land ownership, promoted equitable risk-sharing, institutionalised support for Islamic education, and embedded Tawhidic values into corporate governance. The case illustrates how complementary leadership, professional mushroom cultivation, stakeholder engagement, and strategic partnerships created competitive advantage while strengthening community welfare. As the company expanded, new strategic opportunities emerged, including large-scale commercial contracts, agritourism development, and increased social commitments, creating complex strategic dilemmas regarding growth, governance, and mission preservation. The case enables students to analyse strategic management, stakeholder theory, Islamic business ethics, sustainable entrepreneurship, and balancing commercial objectives with long-term social impact.

Keywords: Islamic Strategic Management; Sustainable Agribusiness; Farmer Partnership

The winding mountain road to Desa Beruk in Jatiyoso District, Karanganyar Regency, East Java, Indonesia, gradually revealed fertile hills covered with coffee trees, vegetables, and dense tropical forests.

The place is situated on the eastern slopes of Mount Lawu. For this reason, Desa Beruk enjoyed cool temperatures, abundant water sources, and humidity. This kind of situation is that the local farmers had long considered a blessing. Yet despite these natural advantages, many young people had left the village in search of employment in Surakarta, Yogyakarta, or Jakarta. Agricultural land remained productive, but its economic potential had not been fully realised.

Teenagers' Dreams

Rizky, an 18-year-old secondary school graduate, spoke confidently about his intention to leave the village. Rizky said: *"No, I don't think I will stay in Desa Beruk. Most of my seniors have gone to Jakarta, Yogyakarta, Solo, or Surabaya. They always tell us there are many job opportunities there. They work in shopping malls with air-conditioning, earn a good salary as sales assistants, and get to meet people from all over Indonesia and even foreign tourists. Here in the village, there is nothing much to do besides farming."* Rizky's feedback manifests how migration decisions are shaped through peer influence rather than personal employment experience. The experiences of successful seniors have become powerful reference points, creating an image of urban employment as modern, financially rewarding, and socially attractive, while farming is perceived as offering limited prospects for personal development.

A similar sentiment was expressed by Budi, aged 19, whose motivation reflected not only economic aspirations but also a desire for a different lifestyle. Budi mentioned: *"I cannot imagine staying here. Since I was born, every day I have seen farms, orchards, and the same village environment. Honestly, I am bored. I want to experience city life. Whenever my seniors come back during Eid, they tell exciting stories about shopping malls, cafés, cinemas, and meeting new people. Their lives sound much more interesting than staying here."* Unlike Rizky, whose emphasis centred on employment opportunities, Budi argued about lifestyle aspirations. His remarks suggest that migration is driven as much by the pursuit of new experiences and urban culture as by financial considerations. Returning migrants unintentionally reinforce these aspirations by sharing stories that portray city life as exciting and desirable.

Although many teenagers intended to leave, some viewed migration as a temporary stage rather than a permanent decision. Siti, aged 17, explained that she wished to gain experience before deciding her long-term future. Siti said: *"My parents hope I will continue helping with the family farm, but I want to work in the city first. I want to gain experience, earn my own income, and enjoy a different lifestyle before deciding whether to return."* Siti's response reveals the tension between family expectations and individual career aspirations. While she values her family's agricultural heritage, she believes that professional growth and independence can be better achieved outside the village before making any commitment to return.

Economic security also featured prominently in the interviews. Andi, aged 18, compared the uncertainties of farming with the perceived stability of salaried employment. Andi said: *"People say farming is difficult and uncertain. Sometimes prices go up, sometimes they fall. In the city, at least you receive your salary every month. That feels more secure to us."* His comments demonstrate that many young people perceive agriculture as financially risky because farm incomes fluctuate according to harvests and market prices. In contrast, monthly wages in urban employment represent stability and predictability, qualities highly valued by first-time job seekers.

Beyond direct experiences, digital media has also shaped rural youth aspirations. Ruzi, aged 18, reflected on the influence of social media. *"When we look at social media, everyone seems to be enjoying life in Jakarta or Surabaya. They post pictures in shopping malls, coffee shops,*

and modern offices. It makes village life look old-fashioned." Ruzi's observations illustrate how digital platforms reinforce idealised images of urban living. Social media rarely portrays the challenges of city life, instead presenting carefully curated lifestyles that make rural communities appear less attractive to younger generations.

The influence of senior peers extended beyond lifestyle comparisons. Agus, aged 19, described how older youths actively encouraged younger villagers to migrate. Agus said: *"My seniors always tell us, 'Don't stay in the village if you want to succeed.' They encourage us to find jobs in the cities because there are more opportunities to develop ourselves."* Agus's expression suggests that migration has gradually become a social norm within the community. Success is increasingly associated with leaving the village, while remaining in agriculture is often perceived as a sign of limited ambition. Such narratives contribute to a self-reinforcing cycle of rural youth migration.

Despite these prevailing views, not every teenager rejected the possibility of remaining in Desa Beruk. Rina, aged 17, explained that her decision would depend on the availability of modern career opportunities. Rina said: *"If there were modern agribusiness companies here with good salaries, training, and opportunities to build a career, I might stay. But at the moment, I don't see that kind of future."* Rina's response offers an important insight. Her reluctance to stay is not rooted in a rejection of agriculture itself, but rather in the absence of structured career pathways. She implies that modern agribusinesses providing professional employment, training, and career advancement could significantly alter the migration decisions of rural youth.

As for Hendra, aged 18, summarised the practical comparison many participants made between agricultural and urban employment. Hendra said: *"Farming feels like hard work under the hot sun every day. Working in a shopping mall or office seems much more comfortable. That is why many young people prefer to leave."* Hendra's remarks encapsulate the broader perception shared by many interviewees. Agriculture is associated with physically demanding work and uncertain returns, whereas urban employment is viewed as cleaner, more comfortable, and socially prestigious. This contrast helps explain why village-based agro-businesses struggle to attract the younger generation despite their importance to the local economy.

In short, the feedback from the teenagers reveals that the challenge facing Desa Beruk extends beyond creating jobs. It involves transforming the image of agriculture into a modern, innovative, and professionally rewarding career. Unless village agro-businesses can offer competitive incomes, career development, technological innovation, and an attractive lifestyle, the migration of educated rural youth to Indonesia's major cities is likely to continue.

Is city life better?

The farm owner reflected thoughtfully on one of the greatest challenges facing rural communities is how to retain young people in the village. Pak Budi explained that the Badan Usaha Milik Desa (BUMDESA) organisation had deliberately designed numerous programmes to demonstrate that modern agribusiness offers rewarding careers comparable to those available in major cities. Pak Budi enthusiastically explained, *"To do business in village is not easy. We have a lot of programs for the youth, for the young people. We want to retain them in a village to work. And of course, in village, we are more towards agribusiness."* Pak Budi emphasised that today's agribusiness is far more sophisticated than conventional farming, encompassing management, marketing, branding, machinery procurement, logistics, and technological innovation. In his encouragement words, *"Because agribusiness is not necessarily 100% you*

will be dirty with the farm, it's all involved like design, marketing, management, and also involved with procurement of the machine." Nevertheless, he acknowledged that persuading young people to remain in the village remains difficult because they are constantly influenced by attractive stories portraying urban life as glamorous and successful. As he observed, *"It is not attractive enough for them to be in village because they have been affected with good news, good situation in the big cities."* Even his children do not want to stay in the village.

Another farm owner, Pak Zikri explained that many young people changed their perception once they experienced the economic realities of working within the agribusiness enterprise. Competitive salaries, combined with significantly lower living costs, made rural employment financially more advantageous than city employment. Pak Zikri remarked, *"Some of them, after we motivated, they remain in the village. And what makes them more resilient to stay on, once they receive the remuneration. And what they receive is much more what their friends who work in the big cities receive."* Pak Zikri He further highlighted that most employees either continued living with their parents or stayed in accommodation provided by the farm, allowing them to avoid many unnecessary expenses. As he explained, *"They don't have to spend much for room or house rental, transportation, uniforms, and other things. They are living together with their parents. Or they can just stay in the facilities provided in the farm."* Ultimately, his aspiration extended beyond business performance to rural sustainability. He concluded, *"We wanted them to stay on because we want to stop the migration from village to the big cities."*

Anep, a former employee who had previously worked in shopping malls in Jakarta described how urban employment initially appeared exciting and full of opportunities. Like many young villagers, he was attracted by stories of higher salaries and modern lifestyles. However, his actual experience proved to be very different from what he had imagined. Reflecting on his years in Jakarta, he said, *"The reality of the big cities are not that good. They are cramped, live together with others. Yet they have to pay very high rental for rooms and pay for transportation, uniform, laundry. And also food is expensive."* He explained that although he worked inside a modern shopping mall, even purchasing daily meals became financially burdensome. As he recalled, *"If they work in the big malls, they can't afford, actually, just to buy every day from the food court."* His experience illustrates how the apparent attractiveness of urban employment often conceals the substantial financial burdens associated with metropolitan living.

Hamzah, a former senior executive of a large corporation in Surabaya provided a broader managerial perspective based on years of supervising young professionals from rural areas. He observed that many graduates relocated to cities believing they would enjoy significantly better lives, yet many eventually struggled with mounting living expenses despite receiving seemingly attractive salaries. Reflecting on what he repeatedly witnessed throughout his corporate career, he commented, *"So in the end, they end up paying a lot from their salary for their basic needs."* In his view, the image of urban prosperity often creates unrealistic expectations among rural youth. He therefore agreed with the farm owner's assessment that, *"It is not really worth it for them to work in a big city for big money. But actually, those are just, you know, delusional for them."* His observations suggest that salary alone should not be used as the primary indicator of economic well-being, as the overall cost of living substantially reduces the actual financial benefits of city employment.

Bahari, one employee who had recently returned from Kuala Lumpur explained that he had initially believed overseas employment would significantly improve his family's financial situation. Instead, he found that accommodation, transportation, meals, and other daily expenses consumed a substantial proportion of his monthly income. Comparing his previous

experience with his current position in the agribusiness enterprise, he remarked, *"When I worked in Kuala Lumpur, I earned more on paper, but every month most of my salary disappeared for rent, transport, and food. Here, I save much more because I stay with my family and everything is nearby."* He further reflected, *"Now I can contribute to my parents, save money every month, and still have time with my family. I never had that when I was working in the city."* His account demonstrates that lower living costs and stronger family support can substantially improve both financial security and personal well-being.

Benni, another employee who had also recently returned from Kuala Lumpur shared similar reflections after comparing urban employment with rural agribusiness. He admitted that social media and returning migrants often portrayed only the attractive aspects of city life while overlooking its everyday hardships. As he explained, *"People only see the shopping malls and tall buildings. They don't see the long working hours, traffic, and expensive living."* Since returning to the village, he has become involved in production planning, machinery operations, digital marketing, and customer management, enabling him to acquire a wide range of professional skills. Reflecting on his decision, he concluded, *"In the village, I feel my work is meaningful. I earn well, I spend less, and I am close to my parents. I don't think going back to Kuala Lumpur is my future anymore."* His experience reinforces the argument that professionally managed agribusiness can provide not only sustainable employment but also a more balanced, financially rewarding, and socially fulfilling alternative to city life.

Indeed, the narratives challenge the widely held assumption that urban employment necessarily offers a better quality of life than rural livelihoods. While cities may promise higher nominal salaries, the informants consistently revealed that high living costs, social isolation, long working hours, and financial pressures substantially diminish the perceived advantages of urban employment. In contrast, professionally managed agribusiness in the village provides competitive earnings, lower living expenses, stronger family and community support, diverse career opportunities beyond farming, and a more meaningful work-life balance. These findings suggest that the decision to migrate to cities is often driven more by perceptions and aspirations than by objective economic realities. Consequently, strengthening modern agribusiness ecosystems and creating attractive professional pathways in rural areas may represent a more sustainable strategy for retaining youth and fostering inclusive rural development than relying solely on urban employment opportunities.

Agriculture of Desa Beruk

Every journey back to Desa Beruk deepened Dr. Rakhmad Agung Hidayatullah's concern about the future of his village. After spending countless hours listening to farmers, youth, community leaders, and returning migrant workers, he realised that the issue was not a lack of natural resources but the absence of an integrated economic ecosystem capable of transforming local agricultural potential into sustainable livelihoods. The stories shared by village residents lingered in his mind long after each conversation ended. One evening, while overlooking the surrounding hills and fertile farmland, he quietly reflected, *"Allah has entrusted this village with fertile land and a favourable climate. Why should our young people leave when opportunities can be created here?"*

The conversations with farmers became increasingly consistent. They spoke not only about agricultural production but also about the worrying exodus of educated young people. One elderly farmer sighed, *"Every year our children leave. They say there is no future here. We grow good crops, but nobody wants to continue after us."* Another added, *"We don't need charity. We need businesses that buy our harvest, add value to it, and allow our children to earn*

a decent living without leaving their parents." Their words convinced Dr. Rakhmad that the challenge extended beyond farming techniques; it was fundamentally about creating attractive rural employment and entrepreneurship.

Equally influential were the testimonies of young people who had returned after working in Jakarta, Surabaya, and Kuala Lumpur. Many admitted that the glamorous image of city life had gradually faded once they experienced its economic and social realities. One returnee reflected, *"In the city I earned more, but I spent almost everything just to survive. Here, maybe the salary looks smaller, but I can actually save money."* Another shared, *"I missed my parents. I realised I was working only to pay rent, transportation, and food. I hardly had time to live."* A former employee from Kuala Lumpur remarked, *"If there is a professional agribusiness here with proper management and career opportunities, I would rather build my future in Desa Beruk than go overseas again."* These conversations strengthened Dr. Rakhmad's belief that the village did not lack capable human capital; rather, it lacked institutions capable of providing meaningful careers.

Instead of immediately launching a business initiative, Dr. Rakhmad believed that any long-term solution should first be grounded in sound Islamic guidance and practical wisdom. He therefore travelled to consult several senior teachers (asatidz) and elders at Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor, an institution widely recognised for successfully integrating education, entrepreneurship, and community development. During one discussion, he explained his concern. *"Many of our young people leave because they believe success only exists in the cities. I want to create opportunities that allow them to stay while preserving Islamic values. How should we begin?"*

One senior kyai listened attentively before replying, *"Do not establish a business merely to make money. Establish an institution that educates people through business."* Another elder added, *"At Gontor, business is never separated from tarbiyah. Every enterprise exists to strengthen education, develop character, and serve the ummah. If business becomes the objective, eventually it will lose its soul. But if service to Allah remains the objective, insya-Allah the business will continue to grow."* A senior administrator further advised, *"Build people before you build factories. If the people have integrity, amanah, discipline, and sincerity, the business will survive many crises."* These conversations profoundly shaped Dr. Rakhmad's thinking. He realised that any enterprise established in Desa Beruk should not merely function as a commercial organisation but as an ecosystem for education, character development, and community empowerment.

Apart from religious input, technical and institutional guidance are equally important. Dr. Rakhmad subsequently met officers from the local Department of Agriculture. During the consultation, he presented his aspiration of developing an integrated agribusiness model owned and managed by the village community. One agricultural officer responded enthusiastically, *"Your village has fertile soil, suitable rainfall, and committed farmers. The problem is not production; it is value addition and market integration."* Another officer recommended, *"If you organise farmers collectively, improve quality standards, and integrate processing, branding, and marketing, Desa Beruk can become much more competitive than simply selling raw agricultural products."* They also encouraged stronger collaboration with universities, cooperatives, financial institutions, and government agencies to strengthen the entire agricultural value chain.

Dr. Rakhmad then convened several meetings with village committee members, religious leaders, youth representatives, women's groups, and experienced farmers. The discussions were lively and sometimes emotional. One youth representative expressed hope, *"If there are real career opportunities here, many of us will stay."* A village elder reminded everyone, *"Development should not only increase income; it should strengthen our families and our Islamic values."* Meanwhile, a women's cooperative leader observed, *"Our mothers already produce many food products. We only need better packaging, marketing, and wider access to customers."* Gradually, consensus emerged that Desa Beruk required an integrated village enterprise capable of creating employment while preserving local identity and social cohesion.

Recognising that such an initiative required institutional and policy support, Dr. Rakhmad sought an audience with the Bupati. During their meeting, he outlined his vision of transforming Desa Beruk into a model of modern Islamic agribusiness that could reduce youth migration while strengthening the rural economy. After carefully listening, the Bupati responded, *"Many villages ask for more government assistance. You are proposing something different—you want to build local capacity. That is exactly what sustainable development requires."* The Bupati continued, *"If your model truly creates employment, empowers farmers, and keeps young people in the village, we are prepared to facilitate collaboration with relevant government agencies."*

These extensive consultations fundamentally refined Dr. Rakhmad's vision. Years of academic work, community engagement, and careful listening convinced him that sustainable rural development required far more than increasing agricultural production. Villages needed integrated enterprises capable of generating quality employment, adding value to local resources, strengthening Islamic character, and empowering entire communities. His aspiration therefore extended well beyond commercial success. As he frequently reminded his colleagues, *"A business should not end with financial profit. It should become a continuous source of worship, serving society while sustaining Islamic education."* From that conviction emerged the determination to establish an agribusiness institution that would not only transform the economy of Desa Beruk but also nurture future generations who could prosper without abandoning their village, their families, or their values.

The birth of CV Berkah Agung Farm

The vision that had gradually taken shape through years of observation, consultation, and reflection eventually reached a decisive turning point. After receiving encouragement from farmers, returning youth, community leaders, agricultural officers, and the Bupati, Dr. Rakhmad Agung Hidayatullah realised that the time had come to transform ideas into a legally established enterprise. He understood that sustainable rural development required more than informal cooperation; it demanded a professionally managed organisation with clear governance, legal recognition, accountability, and a long-term strategic vision.

Following their final discussion, the Bupati encouraged Dr. Rakhmad to proceed with confidence while ensuring that the enterprise complied with all regulatory requirements. The Bupati advised, *"Do not build a business that depends only on one person. Build an institution that can continue serving the community for generations. Register it properly, establish transparent governance, and involve capable people from the very beginning."* The Bupati further added, *"If you can demonstrate that this enterprise creates employment, increases farmers' income, and strengthens the village economy, the district government will gladly facilitate future collaboration and development programmes."*

Encouraged by this support, Dr. Rakhmad immediately began the administrative process required to establish a legal business entity. The work proved far more demanding than he had initially anticipated. Numerous meetings were held with legal advisers, notaries, accountants, agricultural officers, village officials, and prospective business partners. Business objectives had to be clearly articulated, ownership structures agreed upon, operational procedures documented, financial systems designed, licences obtained, tax registrations completed, and banking facilities established. Every administrative document represented another important step towards transforming a vision into an institution capable of serving the community for decades.

Recognising that he could not accomplish such an ambitious undertaking alone, Dr. Rakhmad carefully sought partners who not only possessed complementary expertise but also shared the same values and long-term commitment. During one informal discussion, he explained his expectations to several trusted colleagues. *"I am not looking for investors who only calculate financial returns,"* he said. *"I am looking for partners who believe that business can become a form of ibadah and a vehicle to strengthen our community."*

One colleague responded thoughtfully, "If we join this enterprise, our intention must be the same. We are not simply cultivating mushrooms. We are cultivating opportunities for our youth and dignity for our farmers."

Another prospective partner added, "Profit is important because without profit the business cannot survive. But profit must remain the consequence of serving people well, not the only reason we exist."

After several rounds of discussion, mutual trust gradually developed among the founding partners. They agreed that every major decision should balance commercial sustainability with social responsibility and Islamic ethical principles. Each partner would contribute according to his expertise, for example, management, production, finance, marketing, networking, technical operations, and community engagement, at the same time, they are maintaining collective accountability for the enterprise's mission.

Before formally registering the company, Dr. Rakhmad once again travelled to Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor to seek spiritual guidance from senior *asatizah* (plural of *ustaz* [male teacher] or *ustazah* [female teacher]). He wanted reassurance that the enterprise remained aligned with the Islamic values that had inspired it from the beginning. One senior *ustaz* listened carefully before advising, *"Always begin with niyyah. If Allah accepts your intention, He will open doors that no business plan can predict."* Another *ustaz* added, *"Never separate business from tarbiyah. Every employee should leave your organisation not only with a salary but also with stronger akhlaq, greater discipline, and deeper gratitude to Allah."* A senior *kyai* (spiritual educator) then reminded everyone present, *"Remember, wealth belongs to Allah. You are only trustees (amin). Manage every ringgit with amanah because one day every decision will be accounted for before Allah."*

Before Dr. Rakhmad returned to Desa Beruk, one elderly teacher offered a final piece of advice that remained deeply engraved in his heart. *"Do not pray that Allah makes your business big. Pray that Allah keeps it blessed (barakah). A small business with barakah benefits thousands, while a large business without barakah may destroy the people who own it."*

Those words became the moral compass of the enterprise. After months of preparation, legal documentation, consultation, and collective planning, the founders finally signed the necessary incorporation documents before a notary. The business was officially registered as CV Berkah Agung Farm, reflecting their shared aspiration that every harvest, every partnership, every employee, and every customer would experience Allah's blessings (*barakah*). Rather than merely establishing another agricultural company, the founders believed they were laying the institutional foundation for an integrated agribusiness ecosystem capable of creating employment, empowering farmers, nurturing young entrepreneurs, strengthening Islamic values, and contributing to the long-term prosperity of Desa Beruk.

For Dr. Rakhmad, the registration of CV Berkah Agung Farm was not the conclusion of his journey but the beginning of a far greater responsibility. As he quietly reflected after signing the incorporation documents, *"Today we have established a company in the eyes of the law. From today onwards, our greater task is to establish trust in the hearts of the people and to seek Allah's pleasure through every decision we make."*

Building the Founding Team

Although the legal establishment of CV Berkah Agung Farm marked an important milestone, Dr. Rakhmad Agung Hidayatullah understood that no institution could succeed through individual effort alone. Throughout his years as an academic, he had repeatedly observed that sustainable organisations are built upon complementary leadership, where individuals contribute different strengths while remaining united by a common purpose. The enterprise therefore required people who possessed not only technical competence but also integrity, commitment, and a shared understanding that business should ultimately serve Allah SWT and society.

Before inviting anyone into the founding team, Dr. Rakhmad sought advice once again from senior *asatizah* at Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor. One senior teacher reminded him, *"Choose people not because they are your closest friends, but because they are trustworthy (amanah). Skills can be developed, but integrity must already exist."* Another *asatiz* added, *"A successful institution is not built by one extraordinary leader. It is built by ordinary people who share extraordinary sincerity."* Those words became the guiding principle in selecting the founding management.

The first team member is Abdul Robbani. Among the first individuals who came to Dr. Rakhmad's mind was Abdul Robbani. Although considerably younger, Abdul Robbani had consistently demonstrated remarkable discipline, organisational capability, and leadership potential. His educational journey reflected a unique combination of formal higher education and Islamic *tarbiyah* (educating with nurturing). After completing his studies at Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor, where he was immersed in discipline, leadership, Arabic, Islamic worldview, and community service, he continued his academic education at university, further strengthening his knowledge in business administration, management, entrepreneurship, and organisational development.

For Dr. Rakhmad, however, Abdul Robbani's greatest qualification was not found on his academic transcript but in his character. Throughout his years of involvement in agribusiness, Abdul Robbani had accumulated extensive practical experience in farm operations, production planning, quality assurance, procurement, inventory management, logistics, financial administration, marketing coordination, and human resource supervision. He had personally witnessed both the opportunities and difficulties of managing agricultural enterprises,

understanding that success depended not only on technical cultivation but equally on systematic management, disciplined execution, and continuous improvement.

During one afternoon meeting overlooking the land that would later become the mushroom cultivation centre, Dr. Rakhmad shared the vision that had been growing in his heart for years. *"Abdul Robbani, this company is not simply about producing mushrooms. We are building an institution that creates employment, empowers farmers, and supports Islamic education. Are you prepared to lead such a responsibility?"* Abdul Robbani remained silent for several moments before responding thoughtfully. *"If we pursue only profit, many businesses already do that. But if we can demonstrate that professional management and worship can coexist, I am willing to dedicate myself to this mission."*

Dr. Rakhmad then asked another question. "The road ahead will not be easy. There will be financial difficulties, operational problems, and moments when people question our decisions. What gives you confidence?" Abdul Robbani smiled calmly. *"At Gontor we were taught that sincerity comes before success. If our intention remains correct and we continue improving professionally, insya-Allah Allah will guide the rest."* His response convinced Dr. Rakhmad that Abdul Robbani possessed the balance of professionalism, humility, and spiritual maturity required to lead the organisation's daily operations.

Another team member is Mr. Samino. While Abdul Robbani represented the younger generation of professional management, Dr. Rakhmad believed the enterprise also needed someone whose authority originated from decades of practical agricultural experience and deep community trust. His attention naturally turned to Mr. Samino, one of the most respected senior farmers in Jatiyoso, a nearby village to Desa Beruk.

For more than three decades, Mr Samino had earned a reputation not only as a successful cultivator but also as a mentor to many local farmers. His practical understanding of soil conditions, climate patterns, water management, crop cultivation, agricultural risks, and farmer livelihoods had been developed through years of direct experience rather than textbooks alone. Farmers throughout the regency frequently sought his advice whenever facing production challenges, while younger cultivators regarded him as a patient teacher willing to share knowledge without reservation.

His reputation extended beyond farming communities. When Dr. Rakhmad consulted the Bupati regarding potential leadership for the enterprise, the Regent immediately mentioned Samino's name. *"If you want the trust of farmers, involve Pak Samino. People know his integrity. They know he never thinks only about himself."* Officials from the Regency Agricultural Office expressed similar confidence. *"Pak Samino understands farmers because he has lived their reality. If modern management is combined with his practical wisdom, this enterprise will have strong credibility from the beginning."*

The recommendation was echoed by leaders from the local Chamber of Commerce and Industry, who viewed Samino as a bridge between traditional farming communities and emerging agribusiness opportunities. *"Professional investors may understand finance,"* one chamber representative remarked, *"but Pak Samino understands people. That is equally important for long-term success."*

Even senior administrators from the Khizanah unit of Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor, who had experience managing various educational business enterprises, supported Dr.

Rakhmad's choice. *"Every successful institution requires both professional management and practical hikmah,"* one senior administrator advised. *"Modern knowledge should never replace local wisdom. Instead, the two must strengthen one another."*

When Dr. Rakhmad finally invited Samino to join the founding team, the discussion took place beside the hillside where the first mushroom houses were planned. Looking across the surrounding landscape, Samino smiled before speaking. *"The climate here has always been suitable for mushrooms. The challenge has never been nature. The challenge is consistency, management, and finding reliable markets."*

Dr. Rakhmad nodded before asking, *"Would you be willing to guide our younger generation?"* Samino answered without hesitation. *"Knowledge should never end with one person. If what I have learned can help our children remain in this village and prosper here, then that is a responsibility I cannot refuse."*

What is special about Jatiyuso?

The concentration of place names beginning with "Jati-" throughout the Jatiyoso region is far from coincidental. Rather, it reflects the area's environmental history, settlement patterns, and long-standing Javanese tradition of naming places according to their dominant natural features and cultural aspirations. Villages such as Jatiyoso, Jatipuro, Jatisawit, Jatisuko, Jatisobo, Jatiwarno, and Jatimulyo preserve a historical record of a landscape that was once extensively covered by teak (jati) forests. These names collectively reveal how the natural environment shaped both the identity and economic life of communities that have inhabited this region for centuries.

According to the local elders, the word "jati" refers to the teak tree (*Tectona grandis*), one of Java's most valuable timber species. Historically, the southern part of Karanganyar Regency formed part of an extensive teak belt stretching across Central Java. During the era of the Mataram Kingdom and later under Dutch colonial administration, teak was regarded as a strategic economic resource. It supplied timber for the construction of traditional houses, royal palaces, bridges, railway infrastructure, government buildings, and even maritime shipbuilding. As settlements gradually developed within or adjacent to these forests, many naturally adopted names beginning with "Jati", symbolising both their geographical surroundings and their dependence on the teak-based economy.

While the prefix "Jati" identifies the dominant natural landscape, the second component of each village name provides additional insight into its historical identity or local aspiration. For example, *Jatiyoso* combines *jati* with *yoso* or *yasa*, which conveys prosperity, development, or progress, suggesting a vision of a prosperous settlement within the teak forest. *Jatimulyo* incorporates *mulyo*, meaning noble or prosperous, reflecting aspirations for dignity and well-being. *Jatipuro* derives from *puro* or *pura*, referring to a settlement or township, indicating an established community among the teak forests. *Jatisuko* combines teak with *suko*, meaning happiness or contentment, while *Jatisawit* refers to an area characterised by both teak and palm-like vegetation. *Jatisobo*, meanwhile, likely derives from the Old Javanese word *sobo*, referring to a place of gathering or visitation, suggesting its historical role as a communal meeting place. Thus, although every settlement shares the prefix "Jati", each village possesses its own distinct historical narrative and cultural identity.

Dr Rakhmad explained that beyond its historical significance, Jatiyoso also occupies a strategically advantageous ecological setting. Located at approximately 950 metres above sea

level on the southeastern slopes of Mount Lawu, the district lies within a transitional zone connecting the cool volcanic highlands of Tawangmangu, the drier lowlands toward Wonogiri, and the eastern corridor leading to East Java. This unique geographical position creates an exceptionally diverse agroecological environment characterised by moderate temperatures, fertile soils, and favourable rainfall patterns. Such conditions make the region highly suitable for cultivating premium wood ear mushrooms, coffee, vegetables, cassava, particularly the renowned Jaraktowo variety, with fruits, spices, and various forestry-based agricultural products. For agribusiness enterprises, this ecological diversity provides a significant competitive advantage by enabling product diversification and reducing dependence on a single commodity.

Unlike many districts that have experienced rapid industrialisation, Jatiyoso has retained its predominantly rural character. Agriculture continues to form the backbone of the local economy, while generations of farming knowledge have been carefully transmitted from parents to children. The district continues to benefit from experienced farmers, abundant agricultural land, a strong tradition of gotong royong (mutual cooperation), relatively cool climatic conditions, and lower population density compared with nearby urban centres. These characteristics create favourable conditions for developing high-value agribusinesses that combine modern management with traditional farming wisdom rather than relying on large-scale manufacturing or industrial activities.

For the development of CV Berkah Agung Farm, these characteristics made Jatiyoso an exceptionally strategic location. The district offered far more than fertile land; it represented the convergence of abundant natural resources, rich agricultural heritage, experienced farming communities, and proximity to major markets such as Surakarta, while still preserving its rural identity and social cohesion. Ironically, despite possessing these considerable advantages, the area continued to experience persistent youth migration to large cities and overseas in search of better employment opportunities. This contradiction became the central strategic challenge confronting Dr Rakhmad Agung Hidayatullah and his colleagues, with a question: *“Why do young people leave a region endowed with substantial agricultural potential, and how can professionally manage agribusiness transform that natural and social capital into sustainable local employment?”*

In this context, the repeated "Jati-" place names represent far more than geographical labels on a map. They symbolise a region historically blessed with valuable natural resources and agricultural abundance. The challenge facing visionary leaders such as Dr. Rakhmad was therefore not to discover new resources, but to transform this inherited natural capital into innovative, value-added, professionally managed, and ethically grounded agribusinesses capable of creating meaningful employment, strengthening rural livelihoods, and encouraging future generations to build prosperous lives without abandoning their villages.

Complementary Leadership for a Shared Mission

With the founding team now firmly established, the organisational structure of CV Berkah Agung Farm reflected a carefully considered balance between strategic vision, professional management, and practical agricultural wisdom. Rather than assigning responsibilities based solely on hierarchy or ownership, each founder assumed a role that aligned with his unique expertise, experience, and personal strengths. Together, they represented three complementary dimensions of leadership that would enable the enterprise to pursue commercial excellence while remaining faithful to its social mission and Islamic values.

As the Founder and President Commissioner, Dr. Rakhmad Agung Hidayatullah assumed responsibility for providing the organisation's long-term strategic direction and institutional stewardship. Drawing upon his academic background, extensive research experience, and commitment to community development, he focused on formulating the company's vision, corporate governance framework, strategic partnerships, organisational culture, and future expansion. He also represented the company in engagements with government agencies, universities, financial institutions, business associations, Islamic organisations, and international collaborators. Beyond overseeing business performance, Dr. Rakhmad viewed his role as safeguarding the founding philosophy of the enterprise, ensuring that every strategic decision remained consistent with the principles of *amanah* (trust), *ihsan* (excellence), *maslahah* (public benefit), and *barakah* (divine blessing). He frequently reminded the management team, *"Our responsibility is not merely to build a profitable company, but to preserve an institution that will continue benefiting farmers, educating young people, and serving society long after we are gone."*

The responsibility for transforming these strategic aspirations into operational reality rested with Abdul Robbani, who was appointed President Director. Abdul Robbani became the chief executive responsible for leading the company's day-to-day operations and ensuring that strategic plans were translated into measurable organisational performance. His portfolio included production management, financial administration, human resource development, quality assurance, procurement, supply chain coordination, marketing, customer relations, business development, and continuous operational improvement. He introduced systematic planning, standard operating procedures, performance monitoring, staff development programmes, and financial discipline to ensure that the company operated according to professional business standards. At the same time, he remained committed to nurturing an organisational culture grounded in Islamic ethics, teamwork, discipline, and mutual respect. For Robbani, professionalism and spirituality were mutually reinforcing rather than contradictory. As he often explained to employees, *"Operational excellence is also an act of worship because Allah loves those who perform every responsibility with excellence."*

Complementing the strategic and managerial capabilities of the leadership team was Mr. Samino, who accepted the position of Senior Agricultural Advisor. His appointment reflected the founders' conviction that modern agribusiness should never disregard the invaluable wisdom accumulated by experienced local farmers over generations. With decades of practical agricultural experience, Samino became responsible for advising on cultivation methods, environmental management, production planning, quality consistency, disease prevention, farmer training, and the adaptation of new technologies to local conditions. He worked closely with both experienced cultivators and younger employees, ensuring that scientific innovations were implemented without undermining indigenous farming knowledge. His deep credibility within the farming community also enabled the company to establish strong relationships with local growers, fostering trust, cooperation, and knowledge sharing throughout the agricultural value chain. Samino consistently reminded younger staff, *"Technology can improve our farming, but it can never replace patience, observation, and respect for nature that farmers have learned through experience."* Figure 1 shows the organisational chart of CV Berkah Agung Farm.

CV BERKAH AGUNG FARM

ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE



The three leaders formed a highly complementary leadership team. Dr. Rakhmad contributed strategic thinking, institutional leadership, and external networks; Abdul Robbani provided professional management, operational discipline, and organisational execution; while Samino offered practical agricultural expertise, community legitimacy, and deep local knowledge. Their combined leadership reflected an integration of intellectual capital, managerial competence, experiential wisdom, and spiritual values. Rather than functioning as three separate individuals, they deliberately cultivated a collaborative leadership model in which every major decision was discussed collectively, balancing commercial viability with social responsibility, technological innovation with local wisdom, and organisational growth with the higher objective of serving Allah SWT and empowering the rural community of Desa Beruk.

Indeed, the three founders represented three complementary forms of capital: first, Dr Rakhmad contributed intellectual, strategic, and institutional leadership; second, Abdul Robbani brought managerial competence, youthful energy, and operational excellence; and third, Mr Samino provided experiential knowledge, community legitimacy, and agricultural wisdom. United by a shared commitment to amanah, professionalism, and service to the ummah, they laid the leadership foundation upon which CV Berkah Agung Farm would begin its journey.

A Business Dedicated to Allah

Before formally registering CV Berkah Agung Farm, the three founders believed that one crucial matter remained unresolved. Although the legal documents defined ownership, governance, management responsibilities, and financial arrangements, they did not yet articulate the higher purpose that would distinguish the enterprise from ordinary commercial businesses. For Dr Rakhmad Agung Hidayatullah, Abdul Robbani, and Mr Samino, this was perhaps the most important decision they would ever make. They wanted the company to remain firmly anchored in *ubudiyyah* (servitude to Allah) throughout its existence, regardless of how large or successful it might eventually become.

Consequently, before signing the incorporation documents, the founders travelled to Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor to seek further counsel from several senior *asatizah* who had long experience integrating Islamic education with institutional governance. They also met respected scholars associated with Maahad Riyadussalihin Desa Kerjo, whose *da'wah* and educational programmes had inspired much of the founders' spiritual journey. Rather than discussing production targets, profitability, or expansion strategies, the conversations centred upon a far more fundamental question: How can a business remain an act of worship throughout its entire life cycle?

One senior *ustaz* listened carefully as Dr. Rakhmad explained the vision of building a professionally managed agribusiness that would create employment, strengthen farmers, retain rural youth, and remain faithful to Islamic values. After several moments of thoughtful silence, the *ustaz* gently replied, *"Many businesses begin with sincere intentions, but those intentions gradually disappear once profits begin to grow. Shaytan rarely destroys a business through poverty; more often he destroys it through success."*

The room fell completely silent. He continued, *"If you truly wish this company to become a form of worship, your commitment should not remain in speeches or personal promises. Human beings change, management changes, and future generations may not remember today's discussions. Therefore, embed your intention into the governance of the company itself."* His advice profoundly transformed the discussion. The founders realised that relying solely on personal sincerity would be insufficient to preserve the company's original mission over many decades. Instead, the organisation itself needed institutional mechanisms that would continually remind future leaders why the company had been established.

Another senior *ustaz* from Gontor added an equally important reminder. *"When Allah blesses a business, never ask only how much wealth it has created. Ask how many people have benefited because the business exists. The greatest company is not the richest one, but the one whose existence continues generating goodness long after its founders have passed away."* The discussion then continued with scholars from Maahad Riyadussalihin, who shared their own experiences sustaining Islamic educational institutions over many years. One of the senior scholars explained, *"Educational institutions require continuous support. Students come and graduate, teachers retire, buildings require maintenance, and knowledge must continue flowing from one generation to another. Sustainable institutions require sustainable sources of support."*

Another scholar observed, *"Business and da'wah should never stand apart. Throughout Islamic civilisation, many great educational institutions were sustained not merely by donations, but by productive economic activities and endowments that generated continuous benefits for society."* These reflections gradually led the founders towards an important collective decision. Rather than making occasional charitable donations whenever profits permitted, they agreed that the company's commitment to Islamic education should become a permanent institutional obligation. After extensive discussion, the founders unanimously resolved to include a formal provision within the company's founding agreement requiring that a dedicated proportion of annual net profits be allocated continuously to support the educational and *da'wah* activities of Maahad Riyadussalihin.

As the agreement was being drafted, Abdul Robbani quietly reflected, *"If this commitment is written into our founding agreement, future management cannot easily forget why this company*

exists." Samino nodded in agreement before adding, "Farmers understand the importance of planting trees whose shade they may never enjoy. This agreement is our tree for future generations."

One of the senior *ustaz* smiled warmly before offering a beautiful reflection that deeply moved everyone present. *"Every harvest will then carry two forms of rizq. One harvest feeds families in this world. The other harvest nurtures students who will educate and guide generations yet to come."* Another scholar added, *"When one mushroom is sold, perhaps people only see commercial income. But if part of that income teaches a child to memorise the Qur'an, educates a future scholar, or supports da'wah, then every harvest becomes an investment for the Hereafter."*

The founders regarded this arrangement not as corporate philanthropy or corporate social responsibility in its conventional sense, but as a practical manifestation of *sadaqah jāriyah*, a perpetual charity whose benefits would continue flowing long after individual transactions had ended. They believed that by institutionalising this commitment within the company's governance, commercial success would remain inseparable from Islamic education, community development, and da'wah.

Before concluding the meeting, one elderly kyai offered his final advice. *"Never allow your financial reports to become more important than your accountability before Allah. Investors will ask about your profits, auditors will ask about your accounts, customers will ask about your quality, but on the Day of Judgement Allah will ask whether you fulfilled the amanah He entrusted to you."*

Those words became one of the unwritten principles that guided the founders throughout the company's development.

Convincing Investors

Not every prospective investor immediately embraced the founders' vision. While many admired the company's strong commercial prospects, several questioned whether integrating explicit religious commitments into the corporate governance structure would limit financial performance. During one of the earliest investment presentations, the founders invited several local entrepreneurs, representatives from the regional investment committee, agricultural officers, farmer cooperatives, and respected senior *asatizah* from Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor and Maahad Riyadussalihin. The meeting was intentionally designed not merely as a business pitch but as a consultation (*shūrā*), seeking collective wisdom before embarking on a venture that the founders regarded as both a commercial enterprise and an act of worship.

As the presentation concluded, one experienced businessman adjusted his glasses before speaking candidly. *"I appreciate your production model and market analysis,"* he began. *"But there is one aspect I cannot understand. Why should the company permanently allocate part of its annual profits to a pesantren? Investors normally expect businesses to maximise returns for shareholders."* Several participants nodded quietly. The question reflected conventional investment thinking where retained earnings were typically directed towards expansion, dividends, or capital reserves.

Dr. Rakhmad Agung Hidayatullah smiled politely before responding. *"Because we believe that barakah cannot be measured solely through financial statements. Financial reports record revenue, assets, and profit, but they cannot quantify Allah's blessings. Businesses endure not*

merely because they maximise profit, but because they cultivate amanah, integrity, justice, and the trust of society. We are not reducing the company's value. We are strengthening its moral foundation."

Another investor leaned forward. *"But investors also evaluate return on investment. Won't this commitment reduce our competitiveness, especially when competing with larger agribusiness firms?"*

Before Dr. Rakhmad could respond, Abdul Robbani joined the discussion. *"On the contrary, it strengthens our competitive position. Consumers today increasingly support businesses whose success benefits society. Farmers are more willing to remain loyal to companies that treat them fairly. Employees become more committed when they know their work contributes to something greater than personal income. We believe that our identity as an Islamic enterprise is not a liability, but it is a strategic advantage."*

One member of the local investment committee then offered a more cautious perspective. *"From the committee's experience, many companies begin with noble ideals. However, when export demand increases and new shareholders come in, those commitments are often abandoned. How can you guarantee that this profit allocation will remain after five or ten years?"* The room became silent. It was a question that extended beyond finance to the very sustainability of the founders' intentions.

Dr. Rakhmad answered without hesitation. *"That is precisely why we are embedding the commitment into the company's governance documents rather than relying solely on the personal sincerity of the founders. Intentions may weaken as people change, but institutional governance preserves principles beyond individuals. We want future directors to inherit not only a profitable business but also a sacred trust."*

One of the senior *asatizah*, who had listened attentively throughout the discussion, gently stroked his beard before addressing everyone present. *"In Islam, wealth is never regarded as an end in itself. Allah entrusts wealth to human beings as an amanah. The Qur'an reminds us, 'And spend from that with which He has made you successors' (Surah al-Hadid, 57:7). When a company consciously allocates part of its earnings to sustain Islamic education, it is not diminishing its wealth. Rather, it is investing in the moral capital of future generations."*

Another senior *ustaz* continued the reflection. *"Many corporations establish charitable foundations only after becoming wealthy. There is certainly goodness in that. But these founders are proposing something different. They are placing the pursuit of Allah's pleasure alongside commercial objectives from the very beginning. This transforms charity from an occasional corporate activity into an integral element of governance."*

The chairman of the regional investment committee looked thoughtfully around the room. *"Our responsibility is to encourage sustainable regional investment. Initially, I was concerned that this model might discourage investors. But after listening today, I see that your approach may actually strengthen long-term resilience. Businesses founded solely on profit often lose public confidence during difficult times. A company built upon amanah and social responsibility may enjoy stronger stakeholder trust."*

An experienced entrepreneur who had remained quiet throughout the discussion finally shared his own observation. *"I have invested in many companies over the past thirty years. Most*

investment proposals speak only about revenue projections, machinery, and market share. Very few speak about character. Perhaps sustainable businesses require both."

The senior *ustaz* nodded approvingly. *"The Prophet ﷺ taught that 'The truthful and trustworthy merchant will be with the Prophets, the truthful, and the martyrs.' A successful Muslim entrepreneur therefore seeks not only commercial excellence but also moral excellence. Profit earned with honesty, justice, and sincere intention becomes a source of blessing for everyone connected to the enterprise."*

As the meeting drew to a close, the atmosphere had noticeably changed. Questions that initially centred on financial sacrifice gradually evolved into discussions about institutional trust, long-term sustainability, stakeholder confidence, and the higher purpose of enterprise. Several prospective investors acknowledged that the proposed allocation to Maahad Riyadussalihin should not be viewed merely as philanthropy after profit, but as a manifestation of the company's Tawhidic worldview—one that integrates commercial success with social responsibility and accountability before Allah SWT.

From that day onward, many participants no longer regarded the blessing allocation as a financial cost. Instead, they came to recognise it as part of the company's distinctive strategic identity, demonstrating that in an Islamic enterprise, competitive advantage is strengthened not only by superior products and efficient operations but also by governance rooted in *tawhid*, *amanah*, *ihsan*, *maslahah*, and the enduring pursuit of *al-falah* in this world and the Hereafter.

Partnership with Farmers

The enterprise's leadership made a deliberate strategic decision that distinguished it from many commercial agricultural investors entering rural communities. Rather than purchasing farmland from villagers and gradually concentrating land ownership under the company, the founders believed that local farmers should remain the rightful custodians of their ancestral land. For them, land was not merely an economic asset but part of a family's heritage, dignity, and future livelihood. Acquiring villagers' land might have accelerated business expansion, but it would also weaken the long-term resilience of the local community. Therefore, CV Berkah Agung Farm adopted a partnership-based model that empowered villagers to become business collaborators rather than wage-dependent labourers.

Before launching its operations, the management organised a village consultation (*musyawarah*) at the village hall (*balai desa*). As the Maghrib prayer concluded, villagers gradually filled the wooden hall. Elderly farmers wearing traditional caps sat alongside younger farmers, while several village leaders, agricultural extension officers, and representatives of the village cooperative also attended. Cups of hot tea and local snacks were served as everyone waited for the discussion to begin. The atmosphere reflected both curiosity and caution. Rumours had already spread that a new agricultural company intended to establish mushroom cultivation in Desa Beruk. Some feared that, like many outside investors, the company would eventually purchase village land and leave local farmers as mere labourers on what had once belonged to their own families.

Mr. Samino, the company's Senior Agricultural Advisor whose decades of farming experience had earned widespread respect throughout Karanganyar, stood before the gathering. Rather than beginning with financial projections or technical presentations, he opened with a reassuring message. *"My brothers and sisters,"* he began gently, *"we are not here to replace farmers. We are not here to own your land. We are here because we believe that the future of*

this village depends on strengthening farmers, not eliminating them. We want every farmer here to become our partner." His words immediately attracted the audience's attention. The villagers listened carefully, but uncertainty remained visible on many faces.

After a brief silence, Pak Surono, one of the senior farmers, slowly raised his hand. *"Pak Samino,"* he said respectfully, *"we keep hearing this word partnership. Honestly, many of us do not really understand what that means. You have to explain it clearly. We are ordinary farmers. We are afraid that one day this partnership will become a way for the company to take over our farmland."* Several other farmers nodded in agreement. Another added, *"We have heard stories from other places. Investors first promise cooperation, then little by little the farmers lose control of their land. How can we be sure that will not happen here?"*

Samino smiled patiently. He had anticipated precisely these concerns. *"I appreciate your honesty,"* he replied. *"Your worries are understandable because many communities have experienced that before. But that is not our intention. This company was established with different principles."* He paused briefly before continuing. *"Our objective is not simply to maximise profit. If profit were our only goal, buying all the land would probably be easier. But we believe success is not measured only by how much money the company earns. We want farmers to earn more, educate their children better, improve their homes, and build a stronger future. If each of us continues farming alone using traditional methods, with limited technology and uncertain market access, our income will remain limited. We should not allow ourselves to remain in a condition of constant shortage. Together, we can create something much stronger."*

The sincerity of his explanation softened the atmosphere. Farmers began exchanging quieter conversations among themselves. Instead of hearing the language of corporate acquisition, they were hearing the language of cooperation.

A younger farmer named Arif then stood up. *"I understand your intention,"* he said. *"But farming is never certain. Sometimes disease attacks the mushrooms. Sometimes prices fall. Sometimes weather affects production. What happens if the harvest fails? Who bears the losses?"* This question reflected the concern of many younger farmers who had witnessed unpredictable agricultural seasons. President Director Abdul Robbani responded carefully. *"That is exactly why we designed several partnership models,"* he explained. *"Not every farmer has the same financial capacity or the same willingness to bear risk. Our partnership allows each family to choose the arrangement that best suits their circumstances."*

He then walked toward a whiteboard where three simple diagrams had been prepared. *"The first model is a full company investment partnership,"* he began. *"In this arrangement, the company finances almost everything required for production. We provide the mushroom growing houses, mushroom logs, cultivation equipment, quality control systems, technical supervision, training, and continuous monitoring. Farmers contribute their labour, commitment, and day-to-day management of the cultivation process."*

One farmer interrupted. *"So we don't have to borrow money to begin?"* *"Exactly,"* Abdul Robbani replied. *"You do not carry the initial investment burden."* He continued, *"After the mushrooms are harvested and sold, production costs are first recovered. The remaining profits are then shared, with seventy percent allocated to the company as the investing partner and thirty percent to the farmer. Since the company provides nearly all the capital, we also bear most of the financial risk if production does not perform as expected."*

Several farmers nodded thoughtfully. The arrangement appeared fairer than contract farming schemes they had previously encountered. *"The second model,"* Abdul Robbani continued, *"is designed for farmers who already possess productive land, some equipment, or sufficient operational resources. In this arrangement, both parties contribute meaningful resources. The company provides technical expertise, quality assurance, market access, branding, and distribution, while farmers contribute land, facilities, and operational management. Because both sides invest significantly, profits are shared equally on a fifty-fifty basis."*

One middle-aged farmer smiled. *"So if we contribute more, our share also increases?"* "Yes," Abdul Robbani answered. *"Partnership should always reflect fairness. Islam teaches us that rewards should correspond to contribution and responsibility."*

He then introduced the third option. *"Not everyone wants to become an entrepreneur. Some families prefer financial stability. Therefore, we also offer an employment scheme. Those who choose this model receive a fixed monthly salary together with production incentives and performance bonuses. They do not bear entrepreneurial risks, but they still benefit from improvements in production."*

One young villager whispered to his friend, *"That might suit me while I gain experience."* The discussion gradually became more interactive. Farmers began asking practical questions about marketing, production schedules, quality standards, halal certification, transportation, and opportunities for family members to participate. Rather than giving short corporate responses, the management patiently answered each concern, often relating their explanations to Islamic values of *amanah*, *ta'awun* (mutual assistance), *'adl* (justice), and *ihsan* (excellence).

Toward the end of the meeting, Pak Wiryo, one of the oldest farmers in the village, slowly stood with the support of his walking stick. After listening throughout the evening, he spoke with a gentle smile. "I have attended many meetings with outsiders over the years," he said. "Usually they come looking for our land or our labour. Tonight feels different. This does not feel like employment. It feels like gotong-royong. It feels like cooperation among people who want to grow together."

The hall became noticeably quieter as his words resonated with the audience. Samino nodded respectfully before responding. *"Pak Wiryo, that is exactly the spirit we hope to build. We do not measure success by the number of hectares we control, but by the number of families whose livelihoods improve together with ours. If the company prospers while farmers become poorer, then we have failed. But if the company grows because farmers also grow, then, insya-Allah, Allah SWT will place barakah in our efforts."*

The meeting concluded not with the signing of contracts but with warm handshakes, shared prayers, and a collective sense of optimism. More importantly, the evening marked the beginning of a relationship founded on mutual trust rather than commercial dominance. The partnership model would later become one of CV Berkah Agung Farm's defining strategic innovations—demonstrating that sustainable agribusiness could be built not through land acquisition or profit maximisation alone, but through equitable collaboration, shared risk, and a genuine commitment to the well-being of the farming community.

Professional Cultivation

Pak Samino then introduced the farmers to mushroom cultivation using simple language that everyone could understand. He assured them that growing mushrooms was not as complicated

as many people imagined. Unlike rice or vegetables that depend heavily on weather conditions, mushrooms could be grown inside small, specially prepared houses where the environment was easier to control. This meant farmers could produce crops throughout the year without worrying too much about heavy rain, drought, or changing seasons.

He began by holding up a mushroom growing bag (commonly called a baglog). *"This,"* he said with a smile, *"is where every mushroom begins."* He explained that the bag contained a mixture of sawdust and other natural materials that served as food for the mushrooms. Before the mushroom seeds were placed inside, the growing material had to be cleaned and heated properly to remove harmful germs that could damage the crop. *"The mushroom seed is not like paddy or corn,"* he explained. *"It is already growing inside this bag in the form of tiny white threads. Our job is simply to create the right environment for it to continue growing."*

Many farmers leaned forward to examine the bag more closely. For most of them, it was the first time they had seen how mushrooms were cultivated. Pak Samino continued by explaining that after the mushroom seed was placed into the growing bag, the bags were stored in a clean room for several weeks. During this period, the white threads slowly spread throughout the bag. *"You cannot rush this process,"* he said. *"Just like raising a child, the mushroom needs time to grow strong before it can produce fruit."*

Once the growing bag was fully covered with white threads, it was moved into the mushroom house. Inside the house, the air had to remain cool and moist. Workers watered the room regularly by spraying fine mist into the air rather than pouring water directly onto the mushrooms. Fresh air also had to enter the house, while direct sunlight was avoided because excessive heat could damage the mushrooms. *"Our company mainly grows oyster mushrooms and button mushrooms,"* Pak Samino explained. *"Both have strong market demand because they are widely used by restaurants, hotels, supermarkets, and households."*

One farmer immediately asked, *"Do we have to build a very expensive factory?"* Pak Samino shook his head. *"Not at all. We only need a simple mushroom house built from affordable local materials. The important thing is not luxury. The important thing is keeping the temperature and humidity suitable for the mushrooms."*

Another farmer raised his hand. *"What if we forget to water them for one day?"* Pak Samino smiled before replying, *"The mushrooms will remind you. If the room becomes too dry, they will not grow properly. Looking after mushrooms is much like looking after livestock—you cannot neglect them."* The farmers laughed, making the atmosphere much more relaxed.

Pak Samino then explained that although mushroom farming looked simple, success depended on careful daily observation. Every mushroom house at CV Berkah Agung Farm followed a regular routine. Workers checked the humidity every day, sprayed water according to schedule, ensured fresh air circulated properly, looked for insects or diseases, and cleaned the growing area regularly. Every activity was recorded so that problems could be detected early before they became serious. *"We do not simply guess,"* he explained. *"Experience is important, but we also monitor everything carefully. When we combine traditional farming wisdom with proper observation and simple scientific methods, we achieve much better results."*

One young farmer asked, *"How do we know when the mushrooms are ready to harvest?"* Pak Samino picked up a mature oyster mushroom and showed it to everyone. *"The mushroom itself tells us,"* he said. *"If we harvest too early, it has not reached its best size and customers will be*

disappointed. If we wait too long, the mushroom becomes older, softer, and its selling price drops. Good farmers learn to recognise the perfect time." He often reminded the workers, *"The mushroom speaks to those who pay attention."*

That simple advice became one of the guiding principles for the cultivation team. Workers learned to inspect the mushroom houses every morning and afternoon, carefully observing each crop before deciding whether it was ready for harvest. The discussion became increasingly lively as more farmers asked questions. *"What if insects attack?" "What if one growing bag becomes mouldy?" "Can we use our own sawdust?" "How many harvests can one bag produce?" "How much income can one mushroom house generate?"*

Patiently, Pak Samino answered every question one by one. Drawing upon decades of agricultural experience, he explained practical solutions using examples from his own farming journey. Whenever technical terms arose, he immediately translated them into simple language that everyone could understand. His calm manner and willingness to explain repeatedly gave the farmers confidence that mushroom cultivation was something they could genuinely learn.

By the end of the session, many of the farmers who had initially been doubtful began discussing how they could build their own mushroom houses and participate in the partnership programme. They realised that successful mushroom farming was not based on luck or complicated technology, but on discipline, cleanliness, careful observation, and consistency. As production later expanded, these practices became one of CV Berkah Agung Farm's greatest strengths. Buyers from restaurants, vegetable wholesalers, and market collectors consistently praised the mushrooms for their freshness, clean appearance, firm texture, and uniform quality. The company gradually earned a reputation as a reliable supplier because customers knew they would receive mushrooms of the same high standard with every delivery. This commitment to quality eventually became one of the enterprise's strongest competitive advantages in the regional mushroom market.

Building Wider Networks

As production increased, the founders began engaging external stakeholders.

During a regional agribusiness forum organised by the local Chamber of Commerce, one representative remarked, "Karanganyar has abundant agricultural potential, but scaling small enterprises remains challenging. What makes your model different?"

Dr. Rakhmad replied, "Our competitive advantage lies in integrating entrepreneurship, community empowerment, and institutional governance. Farmers become partners rather than labourers, while profits also strengthen Islamic education."

The discussion attracted attention from several food processors interested in future partnerships.

A Visit from the *Bupati*

Months later, the *Bupati* (District Officer) of Karanganyar visited the cultivation facility. Walking through rows of mushroom houses, he asked, "Why choose mushrooms instead of other commodities?"

Abdul Robbani answered, "Because mushrooms require relatively limited land, generate regular cash flow, create employment, and suit our local climate exceptionally well."

The Bupati continued, "And your long-term ambition?"

Dr. Rakhmad replied, "We hope Karanganyar becomes recognised nationally as a centre of premium mushroom production, while demonstrating that Islamic values can strengthen rural entrepreneurship."

The Bupati smiled. "If businesses like this continue to grow, they will contribute not only to local income but also to rural resilience."

Looking Beyond Fresh Mushrooms

Within two years, management recognised that dependence on fresh mushroom sales exposed the company to fluctuating prices and perishability risks.

A strategic planning meeting was convened.

Abdul Robbani projected market data onto a screen. "Fresh mushrooms remain profitable, but margins fluctuate significantly."

Pak Samino added, "During peak harvest seasons, prices always decline."

Dr. Rakhmad summarised the discussion. "Then our future cannot depend solely on fresh produce."

The management outlined three strategic phases. Short-term priorities focused on stabilising production at 18,000 mushroom logs. Medium-term plans included dried mushroom processing, branded packaging, and partnerships with surrounding farmers.

Long-term ambitions envisioned an integrated mushroom processing factory, export markets, and educational agritourism centred on sustainable agriculture.

The Emerging Strategic Dilemma

By early 2028, CV. Berkah Agung Farm would have exceeded many of the founders' original expectations. Production of premium wood ear mushrooms had become increasingly stable, local farmers were requesting to join the partnership programme, and repeat orders from wholesalers, restaurants, and food distributors continued to increase. The company's reputation for hygienic cultivation and its commitment to supporting Maahad Riyadussalihin had also attracted attention from both public and private stakeholders.

Success, however, brought a new set of challenges. During a quarterly strategic review meeting, Abdul Robbani projected the latest production figures onto the meeting room screen. "Our current cultivation houses are operating at nearly full capacity," he explained. "If demand continues growing at this rate, we will reach our production limit within the next six months."

Dr. Rakhmad nodded thoughtfully. "So, the problem is no longer how to survive," he replied. "The question now is how we should grow."

Only a few weeks later, three significant opportunities arrived almost simultaneously. The first proposal came from one of Indonesia's largest food distributors, which supplied supermarkets, hotel chains, and restaurant groups across Java. During negotiations at the company's office, the distributor's Business Development Director spoke confidently. "Indonesia's demand for

premium mushrooms is increasing rapidly. We are prepared to sign a five-year purchasing agreement with CV. Berkah Agung Farm."

He paused before revealing the condition. "However, your company must triple production capacity within eighteen months. We require consistent volume, standardised quality, and reliable nationwide delivery." The proposal represented the company's largest commercial opportunity to date. It would significantly increase annual revenue, strengthen market recognition, and potentially position Berkah Agung Farm as one of Central Java's leading mushroom producers.

Yet Abdul Robbani immediately recognised the operational implications. "Tripling production means constructing new cultivation houses, recruiting and training many additional farmers, increasing working capital, expanding logistics, and investing in post-harvest processing. We may also need external financing."

Samino quietly added, "Mushrooms are unforgiving. Quality depends on discipline. Expanding too quickly may compromise the standards that earned us our reputation."

The second proposal is about agritourism initiative. Before the management team could fully evaluate the distribution proposal, another opportunity emerged. The Office of the Bupati of Karanganyar invited the company to participate in a regional programme promoting sustainable agricultural tourism. During the meeting, the Head of the Regional Development Agency explained the government's vision. "Karanganyar has beautiful landscapes, strong agricultural traditions, and increasing tourist arrivals. We believe Berkah Agung Farm could become a flagship destination for educational agritourism."

The programme included government grants to develop visitor facilities, demonstration farms, training centres, and educational programmes for schools and universities. The Bupati himself expressed strong encouragement. "Economic development should not be measured only by exports. We also want enterprises that educate communities, create employment, and strengthen regional identity." Several representatives from the Karanganyar Chamber of Commerce supported the proposal. "Agritourism creates multiplier effects," one representative observed. "Visitors purchase local food, stay in local accommodation, and generate income for surrounding communities." The opportunity aligned closely with the company's social mission but required considerable managerial attention and capital investment that might otherwise be directed towards commercial expansion.

The third, is a request from Maahad Riyadussalihin. Only days later, Dr. Rakhmad received a letter from the leadership of Mahad Riyadussalihin.

Student enrolment had increased significantly during the previous two academic years. Existing classrooms were becoming overcrowded, student accommodation required expansion, and operational expenses had risen substantially.

During a meeting at the *pesantren*, one senior *ustaz* spoke with quiet sincerity. "*Alhamdulillah, more parents are entrusting their children to us. But with greater trust comes greater responsibility.*" He continued, "*When this company was established, all of us shared the intention that its blessings would support Islamic education. Today, the needs of the students are much greater than when we first signed the blessing agreement.*"

The *ustaz* looked directly at Dr. Rakhmad. *"We are not asking the company to abandon its business ambitions. We simply hope that, if Allah has widened your sustenance, the benefits flowing to the students can also grow."* The request touched every member of the management team. Supporting the *pesantren* had never been viewed as corporate philanthropy. It was embedded in the company's founding deed and represented one of its defining purposes.

Limited Resources, Unlimited Aspirations

Back at Berkah Agung Farm, the Board of Commissioners convened an extraordinary strategic meeting. The financial projections prepared by Abdul Robbani painted a sobering picture. The company possessed sufficient financial capacity and managerial resources to undertake only one major strategic initiative during the coming two years.

Attempting all three simultaneously would require substantial external borrowing, significantly increase operational risk, and potentially strain both management capability and farmer partnerships. Abdul Robbani summarised the situation. "Every proposal is attractive. Every proposal aligns with part of our vision. But we cannot pursue all three at once."

Samino leaned forward. "Our farmers already trust us because we have grown carefully. If we move too quickly, we may damage relationships that took years to build." One representative from the farmers' partnership programme added, "Expansion is welcome, but please do not forget that quality is our identity. One poor harvest could damage our reputation."

A representative from the Chamber of Commerce offered a different perspective. "Opportunities like the national distributor may not come twice. If another producer secures this contract first, recovering market share later will be difficult." Later that evening, Dr. Rakhmad visited Maahad Riyadussalihin before returning to Beruk.

An *ustaz* who had advised the company since its establishment quietly reminded him, *"Many businesses begin with noble intentions. Few remain faithful to them once growth accelerates. Remember that Allah may test success just as He tests hardship."*

The Final Board Meeting

Late one evening, the three founders gathered inside their modest office overlooking the rows of mushroom cultivation houses. Outside, workers completed the day's final harvest while the cool mountain air drifted through the open windows.

Silence filled the room before Robbani finally spoke. *"When we started, our greatest concern was whether anyone would buy our mushrooms."*

Samino smiled gently. *"Now our challenge is deciding which opportunity we should decline."*

Dr. Rakhmad opened the company's founding deed and slowly reread the blessing agreement that committed part of the company's profits to Maahad Riyadussalihin. After a long pause, he looked at both partners. *"Allah has opened doors that we never imagined. But every door requires a different path."* He placed three folders on the meeting table.

The first contained the national distribution contract. The second contained the agritourism proposal from the Karanganyar Regency Government. The third contained the development plan submitted by Maahad Riyadussalihin. Looking at his colleagues, he finally asked, *"If we choose commercial expansion, we may become a national agribusiness company much sooner."*

If we prioritise agritourism, we strengthen our community impact and regional development. If we direct our limited resources toward expanding support for Mahad Riyadussalihin, we fulfil the very purpose that inspired this company."

He paused before asking the question that would determine the future of CV. Berkah Agung Farm. "Which strategic priority should Berkah Agung Farm pursue first, and why?" The room fell silent.

The decision would influence not only the company's future growth and competitive position but also its relationships with farmers, investors, government agencies, customers, and Mahad Riyadussalihin. There was no perfect solution. Each alternative promised significant benefits, yet each also required sacrificing opportunities that might never return. This was the most consequential decision the founders had faced since establishing the company.

Discussion Questions

Question 1

How did CV Berkah Agung Farm create a sustainable competitive advantage beyond producing high-quality mushrooms? Analyse the company's resources and capabilities using strategic management concepts.

Question 2

Evaluate the partnership model adopted by CV Berkah Agung Farm. Why did the founders reject farmland acquisition in favour of farmer partnerships, and what are the strategic and social implications of this decision?

Question 3

As demand continues to increase, the company faces three major opportunities: expanding production through a national distributor, developing agritourism with government support, and increasing support for Maahad Riyadussalihin. If you were a member of the Board of Directors, which strategic priority would you recommend? Justify your recommendation using both conventional strategic management and Tawhidic principles.