

The Role of food downstreaming in community welfare: Strawberry pancake in Berastagi from a Mashlahah perspective

Eprimanta Simarmata^{ib*}, Atika, Muhammad Syahbudi

Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara, Medan, Indonesia

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Abstract

This research examines food downstreaming in Tanah Karo, with a focus on the production and development of strawberry pancakes in Berastagi, Indonesia, through a mashlahah (benefit) review. This study employs a qualitative approach, gathering primary data through observations and interviews with strawberry pancake businesses, as well as secondary data from a literature review. This study identifies the forms, challenges, and opportunities of food downstreaming in Tanah Karo, highlighting the potential of local commodities such as strawberries to increase economic value and community welfare. A mashlahah perspective was employed to assess the economic, social, and environmental benefits of strawberry pancake production, including job creation, income generation, waste reduction, and support for sustainable agriculture. The study concludes that food downstreaming, exemplified by the strawberry pancake industry, plays a strategic role in increasing the value of agricultural products and driving regional economic growth in Tanah Karo, and emphasizes the need for government support to overcome existing barriers and maximize its potential benefits.

Public interest statements

This research highlights the importance of food downstreaming in Tanah Karo, particularly in the processing of strawberries into pancakes. This approach enhances the value of agricultural products, boosts local economic growth, and improves community welfare.

Keywords: Downstream, Tanah Karo, and Mashlahah

Paper type: Case study

✉ Corresponding: Eprimanta Simarmata. Email: eprimanta77@gmail.com

ARTICLE INFO:
Received 5/29/2025
Revised: 6/19/2025
Accepted: 7/26/2025
Online First 7/31/2025



SERAMBI: Jurnal Ekonomi
Manajemen dan Bisnis Islam,
Vol 7, No. 2, 2025, 235-246
eISSN 2685-9904



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Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengkaji hilirisasi pangan di Tanah Karo, dengan fokus pada produksi dan pengembangan panekuk stroberi di Berastagi, Indonesia, melalui tinjauan mashlahah (manfaat). Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif, dengan pengumpulan data primer melalui observasi dan wawancara dengan pelaku usaha panekuk stroberi, serta data sekunder dari tinjauan pustaka. Penelitian ini mengidentifikasi bentuk, tantangan, dan peluang hilirisasi pangan di Tanah Karo, dengan menyoroti potensi komoditas lokal seperti stroberi untuk meningkatkan nilai ekonomi dan kesejahteraan masyarakat. Perspektif mashlahah digunakan untuk mengkaji manfaat ekonomi, sosial, dan lingkungan dari produksi panekuk stroberi, termasuk penciptaan lapangan kerja, peningkatan pendapatan, pengurangan limbah, dan dukungan terhadap pertanian berkelanjutan. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa hilirisasi pangan, yang dicontohkan oleh industri panekuk stroberi, memainkan peran strategis dalam meningkatkan nilai produk pertanian dan mendorong pertumbuhan ekonomi regional di Tanah Karo, serta menekankan perlunya dukungan pemerintah untuk mengatasi hambatan yang ada dan memaksimalkan potensi manfaatnya.

Pernyataan untuk kepentingan publik

Penelitian ini menyoroti pentingnya hilirisasi pangan di Tanah Karo, khususnya dalam pengolahan stroberi menjadi panekuk. Pendekatan ini meningkatkan nilai produk pertanian, mendorong pertumbuhan ekonomi lokal, dan meningkatkan kesejahteraan masyarakat.

Kata kunci: Hilirisasi, Tanah Karo, dan Mashlahah

Introduction

Indonesia's agricultural sector plays an important role in the country's economy. Abundant natural resources with a tropical climate will certainly encourage economic growth for the community, especially in the fields of plantations and agriculture. One area renowned for its plantation income is Tanah Karo. Tanah Karo is the name of Karo Regency in the province of North Sumatra, where the capital of this Regency is located in Kabanjahe District. Tanah Karo is situated in the highlands of the Bukit Baran mountain range, with altitudes ranging from 200 to 1,500 meters above sea level. The geographical location of the Tanah Karo area also features two active volcanoes, which make the land of the Karo Regency area very fertile, thereby providing it with the potential to be a source of livelihood for the local community through agriculture. Based on the results of the Complete Enumeration of the 2023 Agricultural Census released by the Central Statistics Agency (BPS), the number of agricultural business units in Karo Regency reached 76,310 units. Of these, 76,295 units are Individual Agricultural Businesses (UTP). In comparison, eight units are Legalized Agricultural Companies (UPB), and seven units are categorized as Other Agricultural Businesses (UTL). This data provides an overview of the dominance of individual agricultural businesses within the agricultural structure of Karo District (*Badan Pusat Statistik Kabupaten Karo*).

Huge and superior agricultural products in the Karo region in the form of vegetable crops, ornamental plants, and fruits, especially in the production of strawberries. Strawberry fruit has a high economic value, accompanied by increasing demand, so that the cultivation of strawberry plants has good prospects for development. Strawberry cultivation in the tropics can be successful if carried out in highland areas with elevations above 1000 m above sea level, where temperatures range from 17 to 20 °C, which is very suitable for the geographical

conditions in Karo land (Sinaga et al., 2022). However, the potential as a producer of strawberry commodities has not been fully utilized to produce maximum added value for the people of Karo land. Most farmers only sell their harvest in the form of fresh fruit to consumers. Various problems often hinder the sale of fresh fruit, including fluctuating prices, short shelf life, and the risk of damage during distribution. If these problems occur, strawberries will certainly not be sold out or go to waste. As a result, innovations in strawberry processing are necessary to enhance economic value and prolong shelf life.

Downstreaming is a solution that can be applied by farmers in the Karo land. The development or transformation of the added value of a good or service from raw materials *upstream* to semi-finished or finished products *downstream* is known as downstreaming. In other words, Indonesia's hilirisasi program has the opportunity to increase revenue by organizing the production process from upstream to downstream. According to the Minister of Investment and Head of the Investment Coordinating Board (BKPM), hilirisasi is the key to Indonesia's economic growth reaching 6-7% (Akhmadi, 2024). In addition, the Coordinating Minister for Economic Affairs also stated that Indonesia's trade performance showed positive results, mainly characterized by increasing exports. In 2023, Indonesia even managed to record a trade surplus with China. This success is attributed to the implementation of downstream policies, which are crucial in promoting the acceleration of the industrial sector and national exports (Limanseto, 2024).

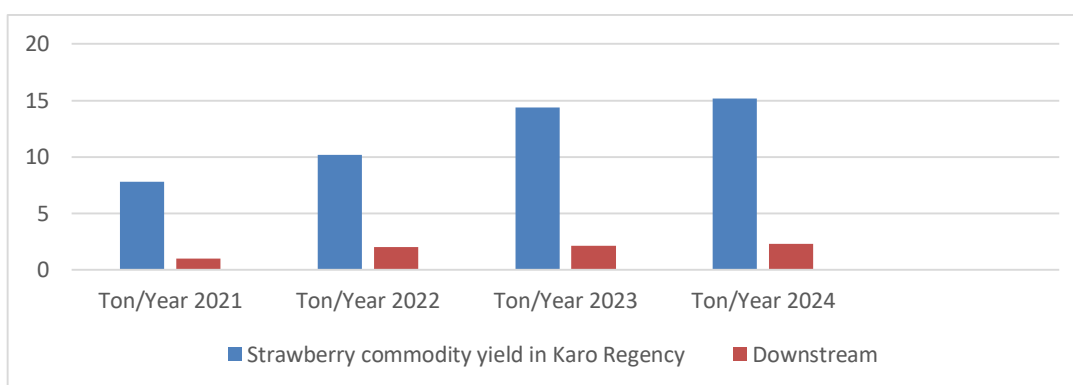


Figure 1:
Commodity Diagram of Strawberry and its Downsides
Source: Karo Regency Central Bureau of Statistics

With downstreaming, agricultural products are not only sold in their raw form; they are also processed into various forms. However, they can also be processed into various value-added products. One form of downstream policy implemented in Tanah Karo is the processing of strawberries into food products, such as strawberry pancakes. However, the application of downstreaming should not be limited to one type of product, but also needs to be developed for various other derivative products, such as strawberry jam, strawberry juice, and strawberry candy (Elfarosa et al., 2021). However, the development of products other than strawberry pancakes has not been optimally implemented in Karo Regency. The implementation of strawberry food downstreaming not only utilizes local agricultural products but also supports the growing culinary tourism sector in the area.

Based on Figure 1, strawberry production in Tanah Karo shows an increasing trend from year to year. However, the application of downstream policies to this commodity has not experienced significant development. This condition indicates that the increase in production has not been accompanied by the strengthening of the downstream process, which should enable the added value of local agricultural products to increase. This imbalance between production growth and downstream implementation indicates the existence of barriers that need to be

identified and overcome. Therefore, more in-depth research is needed to examine the factors influencing the low implementation of food downstreaming in Tanah Karo.

In the context of sustainable development, food downstreaming needs to be analyzed not only from an economic perspective but also from a social and environmental perspective. The mashlahah approach provides a normative basis for assessing the extent to which a policy or economic activity provides benefits to the broader community. According to Jalal al-Din al-Rahman, as cited by Ika Yunia Fauzia, mashlahah is defined as everything that brings benefits to humans (Ilyas, 2017). Therefore, downstreaming that prioritizes benefits must consider the welfare of farmers, the sustainability of the local economy, and its environmental impact.

This study aims to analyze the implementation of strawberry commodity downstreaming in Tanah Karo, especially in the form of strawberry pancake processed products developed in the Berastagi area. This study will employ the mashlahah perspective to assess the extent to which downstreaming provides benefits to the community and how its implementation can be enhanced to achieve a broader and more sustainable impact. Thus, the results of this study are expected to provide strategic recommendations for farmers, business actors, and stakeholders to strengthen the added value of agricultural products through an approach that prioritizes benefits.

Literature review

Food downstreaming

Food downstreaming is a process of transforming goods or products from raw form into semi-finished or finished products that have higher added value. In the context of agriculture, food downstreaming aims to increase the competitiveness of local products by processing agricultural products into processed products that have more economic value and can extend their shelf life. According to Patunru, *downstreaming* is often referred to as *downstreaming* or *value-adding*, which means an effort to reduce the export of raw materials and encourage domestic industries to process these materials. This is very relevant to the goal of food downstreaming, because by processing agricultural products (such as strawberries in Tanah Karo) into processed products such as strawberry pancakes, the added value obtained can be much higher than selling agricultural products in raw form.

In addition, food downstreaming can also help create jobs in the processing sector, boost the regional economy, and improve farmers' welfare. However, Patunru also cautioned that downstreaming should be done carefully. He quoted Albert Hirschman, who warned that downstream policies can be a step backwards if they are not adapted to the country's comparative advantage. Hirschman argues that downstreaming in the framework of import substitution, if imposed without considering the comparative advantage of a country or region, can be detrimental to the economy because it forces the country to use resources that may not be available to it by its natural conditions or potential (Ika, 2017). In the context of Tanah Karo, this is very important to note. Given that Tanah Karo has geographical conditions that are very supportive for strawberry cultivation, downstreaming food through strawberry processing into products such as strawberry pancakes has excellent potential to increase added value. However, it should be noted that this step must maximize the local advantages possessed by the region, rather than simply following the downstreaming trend that can hurt the stability of the agricultural sector.

As suggested by Hirschman, food downstreaming in Tanah Karo needs to be done with careful consideration, by maximizing the potential of available local resources and creating processed products that are not only economically profitable, but also maintain the sustainability of the agricultural sector itself. Thus, downstreaming in the food sector can

provide greater benefits for the people of Tanah Karo while respecting the principles of sustainability and the region's comparative advantages.

Mashlahah

Mashlahah etymologically means something that brings goodness and benefits. In terminology, mashlahah is a principle in Islamic law that aims to take benefits and reject harm in order to maintain *maqâshid al-syari'ah*, namely religion, soul, mind, offspring, and property. According to Imam Al-Ghazali, *kemashlahatan* must be for *shara'*, even though it is contrary to human desires, because often humans are driven by lust. According to Sa'îd Ramadlân al-Bûthî, mashlahah is the benefit that Allah wants for the welfare of His servants. Thus, mashlahah includes all forms of laws that bring benefits and peace to individuals and society, both physically, mentally, intellectually, and spiritually (Zuhdi, 2013).

The definition of mashlahah in Arabic is an action that brings goodness to humans. In general, mashlahah includes everything that provides benefits, both in the form of attracting or producing benefits and pleasures, as well as in the form of rejecting or avoiding harm and damage. Therefore, everything that is beneficial can be called mashlahah. Thus, mashlahah has two main aspects, namely bringing goodness and preventing or rejecting harm (Syaifudin, 2014). Meanwhile, according to the term, *maşlahah* is bringing all forms of benefit or rejecting all possibilities of damage (Mansyur, A., Hudaya, N., & Ali, 2021).

Humans, as the leading actors of the economy, play an important role in the Islamic view in order to achieve welfare. According to Mashlahah theory, this downstream business meets the principle of benefit for the wider community. Food downstreaming, such as processing strawberries into strawberry pancakes, contributes to economic, social, and environmental benefits. Economically, downstreaming can increase farmers' income by reducing dependence on the fluctuating market price of fresh fruit. From a social perspective, downstreaming creates new jobs and strengthens the local culinary tourism sector. Meanwhile, from an environmental perspective, downstreaming can reduce the waste of unsold crops and improve the efficiency of agricultural product distribution.

Methods

This research adopts a descriptive qualitative approach to examine the phenomenon of food downstreaming in Tanah Karo from a mashlahah perspective. This methodology allows for an in-depth exploration of social realities through data collected directly in the field. The data sources include both primary and secondary data. Primary data were gathered through observations and interviews with business owners involved in the strawberry pancake industry in Berastagi. In contrast, secondary data were sourced from relevant literature, including books, scientific articles, and previous research findings (Haryono, 2023).

The study location was selected in the Berastagi Sub-district of Karo Regency because this area has a long history of strawberry processing activities, which aligns with the research focus. Data analysis was conducted qualitatively through processes of description, classification, and the analysis of relationships between the observed phenomena and the theoretical concepts developed. Data collection techniques included observations, unstructured interviews, group discussions, and documentary studies (Rofiah, 2022).

Results and discussion

Food downstreaming in Tanah Karo

In the context of state economics, downstreaming refers to the process of increasing the added value of state-owned goods. Commodities that were previously exported in raw form are

transformed into semi-finished or finished products. This approach can enhance a country's export value and, in turn, improve its economy (Akhmadi, 2024). Research on Berastagi strawberry pancakes illustrates effective downstreaming. By innovatively processing strawberries into pancakes, as demonstrated by Mr. M. Ginting, a unique and valuable product has been created. This initiative not only introduces a distinctive product but also encourages and motivates other farmers to enhance food downstreaming efforts in Tanah Karo.

Food downstreaming in Tanah Karo has significant potential to increase the added value of agricultural products and strengthen the regional economy. Statistical data indicates that 75% of the population of Karo Regency works as farmers (Hasrizart & Nasution, 2022). The agricultural sector in Karo Regency typically produces various upland vegetables, ornamental plants, grains, and fruits, most of which can be processed into finished products that provide added value and positively impact the local economy.

Support from all levels of government—central, district, sub-district, and village—is essential for this initiative. Local industry protection policies have received favorable assessments and have proven effective in supporting the economic growth of developing countries amid global competition (Azy et al., 2025). With comprehensive backing from the government, downstream policies can be more successful in enhancing the value of natural resources and improving citizens' welfare (Aulia et al., 2025). Moreover, food downstreaming in Tanah Karo could serve as a solution for stimulating the regional economy, improving farmers' welfare, creating new jobs, and reinforcing the position of local products in both national and international markets. By fostering synergy between the government, the private sector, and the community, food downstreaming can enhance the competitiveness of Tanah Karo's agricultural products.

Challenges and opportunities for food downstreaming in Tanah Karo

Food downstreaming in Tanah Karo encounters various challenges that must be addressed to optimize sector development and provide economic benefits to the local community. A significant issue is the community's low knowledge and understanding of post-harvest handling, the downstream processing of agricultural products, and product diversification into ready-to-eat offerings with guaranteed quality. Furthermore, human resource management (HRM) and marketing strategies are limited due to a lack of awareness, knowledge, and motivation among community members in effectively implementing marketing methods (Perdana et al., 2021).

Additionally, low digital literacy and limited internet access among farmers result in minimal utilization of digital platforms for product marketing. Consequently, farmers heavily rely on traditional markets and intermediaries, who often offer unfavorable prices. The internet has been shown to increase productivity in nearly all organizations that utilize it. E-commerce can significantly enhance farmers' income by selling products and services. At the same time, strengthening relationships between suppliers and consumers, provided it is accessible and utilized effectively (Utami & Syahbudi, 2022).

Insufficient branding strategies and unappealing product packaging also hinder the competitiveness of downstream products in modern markets. Price fluctuations in agricultural products present another challenge that must be addressed to ensure downstream innovations yield sustainable economic benefits for farmers. Therefore, it is essential to increase digital literacy, expand access to technology, and strengthen digital marketing strategies through continuous training and mentorship to develop creativity, innovation, and professionalism in managing downstream products in Tanah Karo (Hanif et al., 2020).

Interviews with Mr. M. Ginting and his employees reveal several challenges faced in the food downstreaming business, particularly in processing strawberries into pancakes in Berastagi. One major challenge is the instability of strawberry prices, which complicates profit predictions from sales. Limited processing technology also hinders the downstream process. Mr. Ginting noted that there is a lack of high-quality strawberry seeds and inadequate government support for fertilizer and medicine subsidies, directly impacting raw material quality. An employee mentioned the absence of direct government assistance, such as capital support, to help improve their business efforts.

On the positive side, food downstreaming in Tanah Karo presents significant development opportunities, as this area is a key agricultural center in North Sumatra. Effective use of natural resources is foundational for regional growth. There is a positive correlation between the abundance of natural resources in a region and the potential for long-term economic prosperity (Rahmadani & Putra, 2024). With superior commodities such as fruits and various vegetables, the potential for adding value to agricultural products through downstreaming is promising, especially considering the vast land and availability of high-quality raw materials, which can positively impact the economy of the people in Tanah Karo.

As a tourist destination, Tanah Karo also plays an important role in marketing food products to visitors. The characteristics of food and product innovation significantly influence tourist attraction (Lubis et al., 2024). For example, processing strawberries into pancakes can enhance the appeal of culinary tourism in Tanah Karo, yielding significant benefits for entrepreneurs, local communities, and the Karo Regency government. Additionally, the positive impacts of downstreaming include increased technological innovation, job creation, enhanced global competitiveness, and efforts to promote resource sustainability (Wau et al., 2024).

In the context of state economics, downstreaming refers to the process of increasing the added value of state-owned goods. Commodities previously exported in raw form are transformed into semi-finished or finished products. This approach can improve a country's export value and, consequently, bolster its economy (Akhmadi, 2024). Research on Berastagi strawberry pancakes illustrates effective downstreaming. By innovatively processing strawberries into pancakes, as demonstrated by Mr. M. Ginting, a unique and valuable product has been created. This initiative not only introduces a distinctive product but also encourages and motivates other farmers to enhance food downstreaming efforts in Tanah Karo. Overall, the potential for food downstreaming in Tanah Karo is significant.

Forms of food downstreaming conducted by berastagi strawberry pancake and its Mashlahah review

The interviews conducted with Mr. M. Ginting, a businessman, revealed that the downstream processing of strawberries into pancakes in Berastagi represents an innovative approach to transforming agricultural products into value-added items. The harvested strawberries are processed into pancakes by combining them with several other ingredients, including flour, margarine, liquid milk, eggs, sugar, baking powder, and salt. This mixture is then formed into a dough, steamed, and ultimately turned into strawberry pancakes that are sold to consumers. This initiative highlights the potential for positively impacting the economic well-being of individuals in need (Piliyang et al., 2025). The following table presents an analysis of the added value generated from the downstream processing of strawberries into strawberry pancakes.

Table 1.*Fruit Production Calculation*

		Materials/Production Costs	
No.	Item	Number of ingredients	Production Cost
1.	Raw Materials (strawberries)	3.17 kg	Rp.95,100.00
2.	Wheat	4.17 kg	IDR 50,000.00
3.	Margarine	0.63 kg	Rp. 19,500.00
4.	Liquid milk	6.33 liters	IDR 113,940.00
5.	Eggs	41 items	IDR 61,500.00
6.	Granulated Sugar	250 gr	Rp. 4,750.00
7.	Backing powder	41.67 g	Rp. 7,291.67
8.	Salt	10 gr	Rp. 1,000.00
Total cost of materials/production			Rp. 353,081.67
Labor/production cost			IDR 150,000.00
Total cost/production			IDR 503,081.67
Revenue and Income from Processing Strawberries into Pancakes / Production			
Number of pancakes /production (pcs)			42
Price (Rp/ pcs)			25.000
Revenue (Rp/production)			1.050.000
Production cost (Rp/production)			503.081,67
Income (Rp/production)			546.918,33 (108,72 %)

According to Table 1, the application of food downstreaming by processing strawberries into pancakes offers significant benefits. Raw strawberries, valued at Rp 95,100, can be transformed into 42 pancakes, generating total revenue of Rp 1,050,000 per production cycle. The total production cost amounts to IDR 503,081.67, resulting in a net profit of IDR 546,918.33 and a profit rate of approximately 108.72%. In comparison, selling strawberries directly at Rp 30,000 per kilogram yields an income of only Rp 95,100 for the same quantity of strawberries (approximately 3.17 kg), without delivering significant added value. Conversely, downstreaming through the processing of strawberries into pancakes enhances the product's value, broadens market reach due to a longer shelf life and higher selling price, and creates new business and employment opportunities. This illustrates that the downstreaming strategy not only boosts business profits but also contributes to community social and economic empowerment. Thus, supporting local economic empowerment has substantial potential to improve the lives of those in need (Piliyang et al., 2025).

From an Islamic perspective, the concept of welfare is closely connected to the values outlined in Islamic teachings, notably the Qur'an and Hadith, which stress that human happiness relies on positive relationships with God and fellow humans (Siregar et al., 2024). Therefore, studying food downstreaming through the lens of mashlahah is essential to ensure its benefits for society as a whole, as Allah SWT states in QS. Al-Anbiya' verse 107:

وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَاكَ إِلَّا رَحْمَةً لِّلْعَالَمِينَ

Meaning: "And we did not send you but to be a mercy to all the worlds." Imam al-Ghazali defines mashlahah as the pursuit of benefits and the elimination of harm (mudarat) (Nur Asiah, 2020). Al-Ghazali's socio-economic thought is grounded in what he calls the Islamic

social welfare function, which encompasses all human activities while forging strong links between individuals and society (Ridwan et al., 2018). Within the framework of mashlahah, five essential goals must be achieved: the preservation of religion (hifzu al-din), the protection of the soul (hifzu al-nafs), the safeguarding of reason (hifzu al-aql), the protection of offspring (hifzu al-nash), and the safeguarding of property (hifzu al-maal) (Annisa & Harahap, 2023).

In the context of developing strawberry pancakes, applying the five objectives of mashlahah serves as an important framework to ensure overall benefit for the community. First, the maintenance of religion (hifzu al-din) is achieved by adhering to halal principles throughout the production process. This means that every stage of transforming strawberry raw materials into pancakes is conducted ethically and in compliance with Islamic law, positioning the strawberry pancake industry as a halal sector that positively contributes to Indonesia's economic growth (Imsar et al., 2024).

Second, the preservation of the soul (hifzu al-nafs) is ensured through the safety and health of the products. Hygienic processing methods and the use of fresh raw materials guarantee that consumers receive safe and healthful products. Third, the maintenance of the mind (hifzu al-aql) is realized by encouraging innovation and developing the intellectual capacity of business operators. Training and education in production techniques and marketing strategies empower these individuals to enhance their skills and creativity, thus supporting the longevity of the business. Fourth, the preservation of offspring (hifzu al-nasl) is reflected in the positive effects of this business on family economic stability. By providing a source of income, it helps meet children's educational and health needs, thereby maintaining the quality and continuity of future generations. Finally, the maintenance of wealth (hifzu al-maal) is accomplished by increasing the economic value of local strawberry products processed into pancakes. This practice reduces losses from the spoilage of fresh raw materials. It sustainably boosts the income of farmers and business operators. In summary, the development of strawberry pancakes not only yields economic benefits but also enhances the social and spiritual well-being of the community by the principles of mashlahah in Islam.

Conclusion

This study reveals that food downstreaming in Tanah Karo has a strategic role in increasing the added value of agricultural products and encouraging regional economic growth. With the majority of the population working as farmers, downstreaming allows agricultural products such as strawberries to be processed into ready-to-consume products, thus providing a higher selling value. However, the implementation of food downstreaming in Tanah Karo still faces several obstacles, such as limited public awareness about post-harvest processing, the lack of supporting infrastructure, and limitations in marketing strategies. Therefore, the active role of the government is needed in providing support in the form of access to capital, skills training, and construction of adequate processing facilities.

A concrete example of the success of food downstreaming in Tanah Karo is the strawberry pancake business in Berastagi, which has proven to provide significant economic benefits. Based on the mashlahah perspective, the development of this business not only fulfills the aspects of maintaining religion, soul, mind, offspring, and property, but also reflects the principle of comprehensive social and spiritual benefits. With a halal and hygienic production process, innovations that encourage capacity building of business actors, and a positive impact on family economic stability and increased farmer income, downstream strawberry pancake is a sustainable business model that benefits the welfare of the community at large. Therefore, the development of this downstreaming is worth supporting as a strategic effort to increase the added value of agricultural products while realizing social benefits in line with Islamic values.

To improve the effectiveness of food downstreaming in Tanah Karo, several steps need to be taken. First, the government and related institutions must provide education and training for farmers and MSME players to understand better post-harvest processes, product diversification, and effective marketing strategies. In addition, food processing infrastructure and facilities need to be strengthened, such as the construction of strawberry, vegetable, and coffee processing plants, to ensure optimal processing of agricultural products before they are marketed. Capital support is also an important factor, which requires easy access to credit and financial assistance for downstream businesses, as well as expansion of marketing networks to the national and international levels. By implementing these measures, food downstreaming in Tanah Karo is expected to develop optimally and provide better economic benefits.

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Additional information

Author details

Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera, Medan, Indonesia
Eprimanta Simarmata, Atika, Muhammad Syahbudi

Contributions

All authors contribute equally in the research and publication process

Corresponding author

Correspondence to Adelia Natasya

Ethics declarations

Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Availability of data and materials

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analyzed in this study.

Competing interests

No potential competing interest was reported by the authors

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Cite this paper:

Simarmata, E., Atika, A., & Syahbudi, M. (2025). The Role of food downstreaming in community welfare: Strawberry pancake in Berastagi from a Mashlahah perspective. *SERAMBI: Jurnal Ekonomi Manajemen Dan Bisnis Islam*, 7(2), 235-246. <https://doi.org/10.36407/serambi.v7i2.1965>



SERAMBI: Jurnal Ekonomi Manajemen dan Bisnis Islam

Publisher : LPMP Imperium.
Frequency : 3 issues per year (April, August & December).
ISSN (online) : [2685-9904](https://doi.org/10.36407/serambi.v7i2.1965).
DOI : Prefix 10.36407.
Accredited : SINTA 3
Editor-in-chief : Prof. Dr. Suryani
Indexed by : [Google Scholar](https://scholar.google.com/), [Garuda](https://www.garuda.ac.id/), [Master List Copernicus](https://www.masterlistcopernicus.com/)