



Describing the Internal Control of Agrivet Stores in Pagadian City

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Abstract

Purpose: Internal control serves as a vital foundation in ensuring efficiency, accountability, and risk management for micro enterprises such as Agrivet Stores. This research aims to describe the internal control practices of Agrivet Stores in Pagadian City, focusing on the effectiveness of control environment, control activities, risk assessment, information and communication, and monitoring, as well as the challenges and coping strategies of store owners. **Method:** Using a mixed-methods approach, the study combined survey questionnaires and in-depth interviews to gather both quantitative and qualitative data. **Findings:** Findings show that internal control practices are generally rated as high with a mean of 3.10 and standard deviation of 0.694. Qualitative results revealed challenges such as limited staffing, weak documentation, inventory losses, and risks of misappropriation, which owners addressed through strategies like improving recording practices, adopting simple technological systems, documenting losses, segregating duties, strengthening security, and enforcing employee accountability. **Implications:** Overall, the study underscores the importance of adaptive internal control practices in small-scale enterprises, offering insights that can guide resource management, efficiency, and asset protection in the agricultural retail sector.

Keywords: internal control, agrivet stores, risk management, coping strategies, small-scale enterprise

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Introduction

Internal control systems are vital components in organizations that help guarantee accurate financial reporting, adherence to legal and regulatory requirements, and the effective functioning of operations (Taguinod, 2025). These systems consist of five key elements: the control environment, risk assessment, control activities, information and communication, and monitoring processes (COSO, 2013). For micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs), especially those operating in niche retail markets like Agrivet stores, internal control systems play a critical role in minimizing fraud, safeguarding inventory accuracy, and supporting reliable financial reporting.

Agrivet stores, short for agricultural and veterinary supply stores, are retail businesses that provide a range of agricultural inputs, including veterinary products, fertilizers, seeds, farm

tools, pesticides, and livestock feed. These stores are typically classified as microenterprises in the Philippine context, being independently owned and operated with minimal staff and limited capital. Agrivet stores cater to the everyday needs of farmers, livestock raisers, and gardeners, especially in rural and agricultural communities. Their role in supporting agricultural livelihoods positions them as important contributors to regional economies. Microenterprises account for more than 89% of all registered businesses in the Philippines, with a substantial portion involved in retail and agricultural supply chains (DTI, 2023). Agrivet stores fall within this microenterprise category and are particularly active in Mindanao, where agricultural livelihoods remain the dominant source of income. In Pagadian City alone, a growing number of Agrivet businesses have emerged over the past decade, serving as vital links between farmers and regulated agricultural inputs.

Issues such as inadequate inventory monitoring, lack of segregation of duties, and informal recordkeeping practices are prevalent, contributing to internal control weaknesses, including the use of verbal approvals and manual logs, which, while adaptive, lack standardization. Studies of commercial-sector MSMEs have likewise found that many businesses lack awareness and structured implementation of internal controls, often due to limited technical knowledge and weak enforcement policies. Due to the complex nature of their goods and frequently informal operational structures, internal control lapses are common, leading to increased risks of inventory shrinkage, cash mismanagement, and regulatory non-compliance (Peroy et al., 2024; Zapata et al., 2022). Implementing strong internal controls in Agrivet stores ensures accountability across transaction cycles from the purchase of goods to their sale and revenue collection. Controls over sales documentation, stock movements, and cash receipts are critical in preventing fraud and supporting accurate financial statements. Moreover, internal control frameworks help ensure compliance with Bureau of Internal Revenue (BIR) guidelines, Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations on veterinary products, and local government licensing requirements, all of which are essential for the continued sustainability of Agrivet businesses in cities like Pagadian.

However, despite growing concerns surrounding financial accountability in small enterprises, few studies have addressed internal control from the perspective of Agrivet store owners. While a considerable body of literature exists on internal control practices within MSMEs, retail businesses, and agricultural enterprises, Agrivet stores businesses that merge agricultural and veterinary retail functions, have received minimal scholarly attention. These enterprises face distinct challenges involving financial complexity, inventory volatility, and compliance with overlapping agricultural and pharmaceutical regulations. Yet, existing studies often generalize internal control systems within broader contexts, overlooking how Agrivet stores implement core practices such as financial documentation, inventory reconciliation, sales recording, and regulatory compliance. This lack of contextualized research presents a significant gap in understanding how internal control systems are perceived and operationalized in real-world, resource-constrained settings.

This study aims to examine the internal control practices of Agrivet store operators in Pagadian City by investigating how these systems are understood, applied, and maintained in their daily operations. It seeks to generate context-based insights into the mechanisms, challenges, and adaptive strategies that influence the effectiveness of internal controls within this sector, particularly in resource-constrained and informally structured business environments.

Literature review

Internal Control Systems

Studies from different regions highlight the important role that internal controls play in strengthening the performance and resilience of small and medium-sized businesses. Studies

consistently demonstrate that well-implemented control mechanisms help deter fraudulent activities, improve financial transparency, and contribute to long-term business stability (Appiah-Kubi et al., 2024; Ajala et al., 2023;). For instance, small enterprises with well-established internal control mechanisms have been shown to experience higher levels of financial resilience (Taguinod, 2025), and robust internal controls have significantly reduced incidents of fraud and financial misconduct (Bhat, 2023).

Internal Control Practices in Agribusiness

In the Philippine context, the roles of internal control and internal audit are widely recognized as fundamental components of institutional governance, particularly within SMEs and agribusiness sectors. Internal audits have been found to play a vital role in identifying risk exposures, strengthening compliance, and correcting financial system inefficiencies by interpreting how internal controls are constructed and adapted in real-world business settings rather than strictly applying formal frameworks (Quinco, 2023; Orenca, 2023; Peroy et al., 2024). Within rural and provincial agribusiness settings, internal control systems have also been closely linked to improvements in financial management efficiency, particularly through accurate recordkeeping and budget adherence (Capiña & V., 2022; Demillo, 2022).

Components of Internal Control

The broader implications of internal control systems have also been the focus of academic discourse. A well-established control environment, characterized by ethical leadership, clear accountability, and integrity, has been recognized as foundational to effective internal control (Appiah-Kubi et al., 2024). Additionally, information systems integrated with internal control frameworks have been demonstrated to enhance real-time financial reporting, operational decision-making, and risk detection (Alshaiti, 2023).

International Studies on Internal Control

In Latin America, research conducted in agricultural SMEs in Cotopaxi, Ecuador, revealed that structured internal controls lead to improved managerial efficiency and operational consistency. A similar observation was made in Albania, where small and medium-sized enterprises struggled to formalize internal control systems due to limited institutional capacity and reliance on informal practices (Cika, 2022). This finding is echoed in studies of Peruvian service-sector SMEs, where the adoption of standardized accounting and audit systems yielded better financial outcomes (Gagarin et al., 2025). These results demonstrate that internal control systems are critical even in small-scale, service-focused agribusiness settings.

In Africa, Nigerian SMEs have demonstrated a strong correlation between internal control variables, such as documentation procedures, supervision, and segregation of duties and improved organizational performance. Similarly, mandatory auditing practices in Egyptian SMEs were found to have a positive influence on internal control quality, particularly in procurement and disbursement processes (Abouelghit & Gan, 2024).

Several studies from Southeast Asia have addressed sector-specific implementations of internal control. In Indonesia's agricultural sector, internal controls integrated with ethical organizational culture have been linked to reductions in financial fraud (Setyaningsih & Nengzih, 2020). However, gaps persist, particularly in risk assessment and monitoring, where Indonesian SMEs often fall short of COSO framework standards (Setyawan et al., 2021). Moreover, targeted strategies to improve control systems especially inventory tracking and stock valuation have been proposed for agricultural firms operating with limited resources and manual systems (Panferova, 2020; Zakirova et al., 2021).

Risk-Based Internal Control

A shift toward risk-based control models has also emerged in the literature. In the agro-industrial sector, continuous risk monitoring has been recommended as a core principle of effective internal auditing, reflecting a proactive rather than reactive approach to internal control (Kalutskaya et al., 2023). Reinforcing this, SMEs that implemented robust control frameworks reported a reduction in financial fraud due to the early detection of anomalies and transaction inconsistencies (Hossain, 2025).

Internal Control and Sustainability

Practical implementation strategies have been well-documented, particularly in public sector environments where transparency and accountability are institutional requirements. In Indonesia, the integration of internal audits and control systems was found to significantly deter financial malpractice, especially when paired with regular reconciliation and compliance reviews. Concerning financial performance, studies in the Philippines have shown that weaknesses in budgeting, procurement, and inventory controls adversely affect profitability and long-term viability in agribusinesses (Pomar et al., 2021; Isip, 2022).

Efficiency gains from internal control mechanisms extend beyond financial reporting. In the Majes District of Peru, internal control systems were associated with improvements in administrative transparency and operational consistency. Meanwhile, (Demillo 2022) proposed a scalable training framework for small-scale agricultural firms in the Philippines to bridge competency gaps in control design and implementation.

In recent discourse, internal control systems are increasingly being viewed through the lens of sustainability and governance. A well-structured internal control environment has been directly tied to long-term business resilience and ethical compliance, key components of Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) standards (Appiah-Kubi et al., 2024). As agribusinesses confront climate and market volatility, the role of internal controls in safeguarding continuity and stakeholder trust becomes even more critical. In support of this, internal controls have been directly linked to enterprise sustainability, helping small businesses align with governance principles while enhancing risk mitigation and stakeholder trust (Nqala & Musikavanhu, 2023).

Method

This study employed a mixed-methods approach using a sequential explanatory research design. Quantitative data were collected first through a structured survey to determine the extent of internal control implementation among Agrivet store operators in Pagadian City. This was followed by qualitative interviews to further explain and contextualize the quantitative results. The integration of numerical data and narrative insights allowed for a more comprehensive understanding of internal control practices.

The study was conducted in Pagadian City, Zamboanga del Sur, a regional center known for its agricultural and commercial activities. The scope of the study focused on micro-scale Agrivet stores operating within the city that sell agricultural and veterinary products such as feeds, fertilizers, seeds, and animal medicines. The location was selected due to the concentration of Agrivet stores and their role in supporting local agricultural production.

The research participants consisted of owners or authorized representatives of Agrivet stores in Pagadian City. Using purposive sampling, 30 out of 48 registered Agrivet stores were selected for the quantitative phase, representing approximately 62.5% of the population.

Participants were required to be registered microenterprises, operate for at least three years, employ fewer than ten workers, and be actively involved in daily operations and financial decision-making. For the qualitative phase, five participants were selected from the survey respondents based on their internal control assessment results to capture varying

practices and experiences. Two instruments were used: a structured survey questionnaire adapted from Nashwan and Ashour (2023), and a semi-structured interview guide designed to gather in-depth information on internal control practices. Permission to conduct the study was obtained prior to data gathering. The survey questionnaire was validated and administered to selected participants. Based on the results, follow-up interviews were conducted with selected respondents after securing informed consent.

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics such as frequency counts, percentages, and weighted mean with the aid of SPSS software. Qualitative data were analyzed through coding and thematic categorization following Merriam’s qualitative case study approach. Ethical standards were observed throughout the study. Participation was voluntary, informed consent was obtained, confidentiality was maintained, and data were handled in compliance with the Data Privacy Act of 2012 (Republic Act No. 10173).

Results and discussion

Internal control practices were assessed using five COSO components. Table 1 summarizes the overall level of implementation.

Table 1. Summary of internal control practices in agrivet stores

Indicator	Mean	Standard Deviation	Interpretation
Control Environment	3.11	0.688	High
Risk Assessment	3.05	0.677	High
Control Activities	2.90	0.817	High
Information and Communication	3.16	0.706	High
Monitoring	3.29	0.585	Very High
Overall	3.10	0.694	High

Hypothetical Mean Range: 1.00–1.75 = Very Low; 1.76–2.50 = Low; 2.51–3.25 = High; 3.26–4.00 = Very High

The results show that Agrivet stores demonstrate a high overall level of internal control implementation. Monitoring emerged as the strongest component, while Control Activities obtained the lowest mean, indicating areas for improvement. These findings suggest that although internal control systems are generally effective, the consistency and adaptability of certain practices vary across components.

Control environment.

It registered a high level of implementation (Mean = 3.11). This indicates that Agrivet store owners emphasize ethical values, employee competence, and accountability. Strong leadership and owner involvement contribute to maintaining integrity and discipline within store operations. However, gaps in reporting flow and coordination suggest the need to strengthen communication structures to ensure consistent application of policies. A strong control environment supports ethical behavior and reliable operations, especially in small enterprises where management oversight plays a critical role (COSO, 2013; Arens et al., 2014).

Risk assessment.

It was also rated high (Mean = 3.05), showing that Agrivet stores are generally aware of external and operational risks such as price fluctuations and supply issues. However, results reveal limited formal analysis and planning in addressing identified risks. This indicates a largely reactive approach rather than a proactive risk management system. Effective risk assessment requires structured identification, evaluation, and mitigation strategies (Kaplan &

Mikes, 2012). Strengthening these processes would enhance business resilience and sustainability.

Control activities.

It obtained the lowest mean among the components (Mean = 2.90), though still interpreted as high. Asset tracking, task segregation, and authorization procedures are present, but regular updating and adjustment of controls are limited. This suggests that controls exist but may not always adapt to operational changes or emerging risks. For microenterprises with limited staffing, clear documentation, defined responsibilities, and regular review of procedures are essential to prevent errors and misappropriation (Hall, 2015; Morrison, 2015).

Information and communication.

Its practices were rated high (Mean = 3.16). Internal reporting and information presentation are generally clear and reliable, supporting management decision-making. However, mechanisms for handling feedback from external stakeholders are weak, limiting responsiveness and transparency. Effective communication enhances coordination and accountability by ensuring that relevant information flows across all levels of the organization (COSO, 2013; Robbins & Judge, 2017).

Monitoring.

It emerged as the strongest component with a very high level of implementation (Mean = 3.29). Agrivet stores regularly review operations, report deficiencies, and follow up on corrective actions. This indicates a strong emphasis on oversight and accountability. Nonetheless, monitoring would be more effective if results were consistently used to improve weaker areas such as risk assessment and control activities. Strong monitoring systems help detect issues early and reinforce compliance and ethical behavior (Association of Certified Fraud Examiners, 2020).

Challenges in Internal Control Implementation

Weak Inventory Monitoring (Control Activities).

Participants consistently reported the absence of systematic inventory monitoring. Inventory discrepancies arose from delivery errors, limited manpower, and heavy customer traffic, leading to unrecorded sales, shortages, and overages. Monitoring relied heavily on delivery receipts, memory, and occasional stock counts rather than formal reconciliation. As one participant noted, inventory errors often occurred when deliveries were not properly tallied during unloading. Observations confirmed inconsistent verification of deliveries and irregular updating of inventory records, even in stores with basic computerized systems.

Stock spoilage and damage (risk assessment).

Stock damage caused by rats, rain, storms, and delivery handling was a recurring issue across stores. Participants emphasized that spoiled feeds and damaged packaging resulted in unavoidable losses that directly reduced profitability. Observations and document analysis confirmed frequent inventory entries marked as “damaged” or “wasted,” supporting interview accounts. These findings indicate weak preventive controls against environmental and pest-related risks.

Theft and Fraud (Control Activities).

Theft and misappropriation were identified as persistent risks, originating from both insiders and outsiders. Participants shared experiences of cash pocketing, deception, and unrecorded sales, particularly during busy periods when employees handled multiple roles.

Observations and document reviews revealed overlapping duties in cash handling, sales recording, and inventory management, increasing exposure to fraud.

Staffing limitations (control environment).

Limited manpower forced employees to perform multiple tasks simultaneously, including cashiering, recording, inventory handling, and manual labor. Participants explained that hiring additional staff was often not financially viable due to low profit margins. Observations confirmed employee workload strain, delayed record updates, and inefficiencies during peak hours, highlighting structural constraints affecting internal control effectiveness.

Coping strategies implemented by agrivet store owners

Improving Recording Practices.

Despite resource limitations, store owners implemented practical recording strategies such as daily or frequent stock checks, manual logbooks, reconciliation of sales with remaining stock, and the use of multiple receipts. These practices, though informal, aimed to improve accuracy and accountability. Document analysis confirmed the use of handwritten records, photographed reports, and basic reconciliation methods.

Utilization of POS and simple technologies.

Participants adopted POS systems mainly for pricing and sales monitoring while retaining manual inventory checks. Some stores implemented virtual cashier systems to separate cash handling from recording. This hybrid approach improved oversight without fully relying on technology, addressing errors caused by manual input and staffing constraints.

Documenting losses.

Store owners systematically documented damaged or wasted inventory by recording details, weighing discrepancies, and attaching photos or videos as evidence. These records supported audit requirements, reduced suspicion of misappropriation, and helped identify recurring loss patterns such as pest infestation and weather-related damage.

Segregating duties.

To reduce fraud risk, responsibilities were divided where possible. Some stores separated in-store cashier functions from sales encoding through virtual cashiers. Although complete segregation was challenging, this practice reduced workload pressure and improved transaction accuracy.

Strengthening security measures.

Security practices included installing CCTV cameras, employing security personnel, and conducting end-of-day inventory checks. However, observations revealed inconsistent use of these measures, indicating that security tools were present but not always fully integrated into daily controls.

Enforcing employee accountability.

Accountability was enforced through attendance monitoring, investigation of losses, and disciplinary actions for repeated absences or misconduct. Participants emphasized that accountability helped deter misappropriation and reinforced ethical behavior among employees.

Conclusions

The qualitative findings support Contingency Theory, which posits that internal control effectiveness depends on alignment with organizational context. Agrivet Stores adapted control

practices to their limited manpower, resources, and operational risks by combining manual methods with simple technologies and informal oversight. While these adaptive strategies enabled continued operations, they also revealed vulnerabilities that require strengthening, particularly in risk assessment and control activities.

The study concludes that internal control practices in Agrivet Stores in Pagadian City are generally effective, with monitoring identified as the strongest component. However, weaknesses remain in risk assessment, documentation, and control activities due to manpower and resource limitations. While internal control is recognized as important, its implementation is often uneven. Nonetheless, the adaptive strategies employed by store owners demonstrate that effective internal control can be achieved through practical, context-based approaches suited to microenterprise operations.

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