

# EKOTHE: Developing The Creative Economy Through Corn Silk Herbal Tea Processing

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## ABSTRACT

### Keywords:

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Serut Village is one of the agricultural villages in Jember where most of the residents work as farmers, especially corn farmers. The corn harvest is always sold raw, resulting in the accumulation of corn harvest waste such as corn husks and corn silk, even though both types of waste still have many uses if processed into products such as herbal tea that helps relieve urinary tract problems, prevent kidney stones, lower blood pressure, and help control blood sugar. Therefore, this activity aims to improve the skills of the Serut Village community in processing waste into marketable products, supporting the utilization of local resources, and introduce processed corn silk tea (EKOTHE) as a healthy alternative beverage. The implementation method for implementing the corn silk processing program into herbal tea is divided into three stages: pre-program, program implementation, and post-program. The results indicate an improvement in community skills in processing herbal products, the establishment of creative business groups, and increased awareness of the added value of agricultural waste. This innovation is expected to serve as a model for developing a local-based creative economy while enhancing the welfare of rural communities.

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## INTRODUCTION

Jember Regency has three leading commodity sub-sectors, one of which is corn. This commodity has great potential for further development due to its abundant availability and its utilization is not yet optimal in many areas, including Serut Village. Serut Village has great potential in the agricultural sector, which is the main livelihood sector for the community, especially corn cultivation. However, the potential for managing agricultural waste such as corn

husks has not been optimally utilized. In fact, this waste has high economic value and health benefits if processed properly, one of which is into herbal tea products. Corn husks and other residues from corn harvesting contain high levels of cellulose, hemicellulose, and lignin (Perwitasari et al., 2023; Ilmi, et al., 2023). These compounds can be used as raw material for value-added processes. The lack of training, skills, and access to technology in more modern processing efforts is a major obstacle for the community in optimally utilizing their harvest (Aprillianto et al., 2024).

The lack of training, skills, and access to technology in corn processing can hinder communities from creating high-value products, such as corn herbal tea. In Indonesia, studies have found that the agro-industry supply chain for corn shows limited post-harvest processing and weak value-addition by farmers, thus hampering competitiveness (Arifani & Mahfudz, 2024; Perdana, 2021; Sibuea et al., 2023). Farmers often face the problem of lacking knowledge and resources to implement modern processing techniques and innovative business approaches that can increase the market value of their agricultural products (Dong, 2021; Sharma & Bhatt, 2022; Gadanakis, 2024). Insufficient of processing skills and access to technology are major factors that hinder innovation and the competitiveness of corn products in the market (Usman & Hapsari, 2020; Masere & Worth, 2022). The people of Serut Village are still highly dependent on selling raw corn as their main source of income without adding value to the product. This condition causes their income to remain relatively low, since the products sold are only in the form of unprocessed raw materials that have not been enhanced to increase their market value. In addition, the lack of training in corn-based product innovation has also become a major factor hampering the economic development of the community.

The limited skills in processing corn into higher-value products have prevented the community from making optimal use of their agricultural yields. Without the ability to diversify products and implement proper marketing strategies, villagers struggle to reach wider markets, leaving their harvests sold at low prices. Therefore, efforts are needed to improve community capacity through corn-based product innovation training and to strengthen market access so that the local economy can grow and provide greater benefits for their overall welfare. The solution offered is training in innovation based on corn husk waste for the production of environmentally friendly herbal tea with broad market opportunities. Corn husks contain bioactive compounds, such as flavonoids and phenolics, which can be extracted and used to produce herbal tea (Pashazadeh et al., 2022; Faiza et al., 2023). The proposed solution is innovation training based on corn silk waste for the production of environmentally friendly herbal tea with broad market potential. Corn silk contains bioactive compounds, such as flavonoids and phenolics, which are beneficial to health (Wijianto et al., 2023). The training covers production, packaging, and marketing, as well as ongoing assistance to ensure that businesses develop independently, improve skills,

access technology, and support the economy and the environment (Natika et al., 2024; Arjuna et al., 2018). Through the EKOTHE (Creative Economy of Herbal Tea Processing) community service program, the community is encouraged to develop skills in processing waste into healthy and economically valuable herbal tea.

Through training, the program aims to empower residents, especially Posyandu cadre mothers, in utilizing corn silk as a raw material for innovative products that support the family economy and environmental sustainability. Through training and mentoring, residents are equipped with technical skills and entrepreneurial knowledge so that they are able to manage products independently and sustainably. Therefore, this study aims to increase community income, fostering an entrepreneurial spirit based on the potential of the village, and raising community awareness in the productive use of agricultural waste.

The research's contribution lies in empowering the Serut Village community by improving their skills in processing agricultural waste, particularly corn silk, into high-value herbal products. The research not only provides practical training on producing herbal tea from corn silk (EKOTHE), but also introduces a creative business approach that can improve market access for local products. This allows the community to reduce their dependence on raw material sales and shift to products with higher added value, ultimately potentially improving their well-being.

## **METHOD**

This study employed a descriptive participatory method to implement and evaluate a community-based training program. The program was conducted at the Village Hall of Serut, Panti District, Jember Regency. The location was chosen because the corn harvests of local farmers in Serut Village are generally sold in raw form, which results in a low selling price and weak competitiveness in the market. Furthermore, the community faces challenges such as limited training, inadequate skills, and a lack of access to technology for corn processing (Usman & Hapsari, 2020). A total of 20 participants took part in the program, consisting entirely of women from the village health post (Posyandu) cadre group. The selection of this site and the participants therefore provided an opportunity to empower the community through skill development and innovation in agricultural product processing.

The tools used in the program included an electric oven, electric pot, scissors, basin, scale, tea strainer, spoon, chopper, digital scale, and packaging materials such as tea bags, standing pouches, and branded labels. The ingredients consisted of corn silk, cardamom, lemongrass, cloves, cinnamon, water, and natural sweeteners such as honey or sugar. These tools and ingredients were selected to support the development of a functional herbal tea product derived from corn by-products, while also promoting the utilization of locally available

resources (Kurniawan et al., 2024: 48-49).

The program was implemented in several stages, beginning with a survey to identify community needs and observe available resources. The planning stage included preparing training modules, budgeting, and scheduling. The design stage focused on developing training materials and disseminating the program to participants. The preparation stage involved providing the necessary tools and ingredients, while the implementation stage consisted of theoretical and practical training sessions, including marketing strategies. Monitoring and evaluation were conducted to assess participants' skills and measure the effectiveness of the training. Finally, the post-program stage included business mentoring, recommendations for potential business partners, and the finalization of program outputs. This methodological design ensured that the training emphasized not only technical skills in herbal tea processing but also sustainability and entrepreneurship, thereby increasing the competitiveness of local agricultural products (Amalia, 2025).

## FINDING AND DISCUSSION

### Process of Making Ekothe Herbal Tea

The process of making corn silk herbal tea starts from selecting the main and additional ingredients. The ingredients used consist of corn silk, cardamom, lemongrass, cinnamon and cloves in a ratio of 1:2:2:2 grams. All stages must pay attention to hygiene standards, for example by using gloves, so that the resulting product is safe for consumption (see Figure 1). Applying proper processing will produce corn hair herbal tea which is not only beneficial for health, but also competitive in the market. The first stage is washing the ingredients, namely cleaning the corn silk using running water to remove dirt and dust. Spices do not need to be washed so that their aroma and natural contents are maintained.



**Figure 1. Ingredients of EKOTHE herbal tea**

After that, the drying process is carried out. Drying can be done using two methods, namely traditionally by drying in the sun or modernly using an oven. In this activity, the traditional method was chosen because it is simpler and suits the conditions of the Serut Village community. Next, the dry material is ground. Refining can be done with a chopper for more even results or traditionally by grinding to make the taste and aroma of herbal tea stronger. Once the ingredients

are ready, the tea is packaged in tea bags for easy brewing. The boiling process is done by boiling water until it boils, then placing the tea bag in hot water until the distinctive aroma comes out. The final stage is serving, namely pouring corn silk herbal tea which is ready to drink as a healthy drink and has economic value.



**Figure 2. Process of making EKOTHE herbal tea**

Ekothe herbal tea packaging is unique, combining a natural and modern feel. The design uses green and brown colors, depicting freshness and enhancing the attractiveness of the packaging, complemented by the product's identity. The front clearly displays the product name, along with illustrations of the main ingredients, such as corn silk, lemongrass, cardamom, cloves, and cinnamon, so consumers immediately know the ingredients. The packaging also displays sugar-free and halal labels as a guarantee of quality and safety. The bottom of the packaging is transparent, allowing the contents of the tea bag to be seen, creating an honest and reassuring impression. The zippered pouch adds practicality because it is easy to open and close, maintains a fresh aroma, and makes the product more hygienic and attractive to market.



**Figure 3. EKOTHE Herbal Tea Product Packaging**

Ekothe herbal tea is marketed through two main channels: direct outreach and online media. Outreach typically takes place during village events. This method aims to introduce the product directly to consumers, provide opportunities to try it, and explain the benefits of Ekothe herbal tea in a more interactive way. Furthermore, digital marketing is also conducted through social media, particularly Instagram. Ekothe products are promoted through the account *@promahadesa.serut2025*, which serves as an online showcase for product packaging, advantages, benefits, and ordering information. This online

marketing strategy facilitates broader market reach, not limited to the local community but also reaching consumers in various regions. With the combination of direct outreach and digital promotion, Ekothe herbal tea is expected to gain wider recognition, increase public purchasing interest, and compete in the herbal product market.

### **Impact of the program EKOTHE**

The EKOTHE program, which focuses on processing corn silk waste into herbal tea products, generates various positive impacts for the community of Serut Village across economic, social, educational, environmental, and health dimensions. From an economic perspective, this program enhances the added value of corn agricultural products. Corn silk, previously regarded merely as waste, can now be transformed into high value herbal beverages. This initiative not only creates new business opportunities within the creative economy sector but also increases farmers' income, particularly among corn producers. Moreover, it reduces the community's reliance on selling raw corn at relatively low and less competitive prices, thereby gradually strengthening the village's economic competitiveness. From a social perspective, the program plays a pivotal role in empowering the local community. Through structured training activities, residents acquire new skills in processing agricultural by-products into innovative products. This empowerment fosters greater self-confidence and independence, as villagers learn to develop enterprises based on untapped local potential.

In terms of education and skills development, the EKOTHE program provides valuable learning experiences for Serut villagers. Participants gain not only technical knowledge related to herbal product processing but also essential business management competencies that support production and marketing efforts. The enhancement of these skills broadens opportunities for individuals to establish independent businesses or collaborate through joint entrepreneurial initiatives. From an environmental perspective, EKOTHE contributes to sustainable waste management by reducing agricultural residues. Corn silk, once considered mere harvest refuse with the potential to accumulate, is now effectively utilized as a raw material for herbal tea products. This practice encourages an environmentally conscious mindset by promoting the sustainable use of local resources while minimizing waste pollution. Consequently, the program aligns with broader efforts to achieve sustainable natural resource management.

Finally, in the health domain, EKOTHE products offer tangible benefits for community well being. Corn silk tea is known to contain bioactive compounds with antioxidant properties that support human health. By introducing this herbal tea as an alternative healthy beverage, the program not only raises awareness of healthier lifestyles but also ensures that the community enjoys direct health benefits from consuming high-quality, locally sourced

products. Overall, the EKOTHE program presents an innovative solution that addresses multiple aspects of community life in Serut Village. Beyond tackling the issue of low raw corn prices, it transforms local perceptions of agricultural waste, strengthens the utilization of village resources, and reinforces economic resilience. With its holistic contributions, Serut Village demonstrates the potential to evolve into an innovative rural community capable of optimizing agricultural outputs through creative processing, thereby serving as a practical model of a creative economy grounded in local wisdom.

The EKOTHE program offers several key advantages. First, it utilizes local resources by transforming corn silk waste into high value products, thereby increasing the usefulness of agricultural outputs. Second, it emphasizes community empowerment, as residents are actively involved in training, mentoring, and production, which fosters independence and a strong sense of ownership. Moreover, corn silk herbal tea has significant market potential, supported by the growing trend of healthy and natural product consumption. From an environmental perspective, the program contributes to reducing agricultural waste while promoting eco-friendly practices. Another advantage lies in knowledge and skill transfer, particularly in processing techniques, business management, and product marketing. Overall, EKOTHE not only enhances economic benefits, but also generates multidimensional impacts on social, educational, health, and environmental aspects, making it a sustainable model for innovative rural development.

The EKOTHE program still faces several limitations. In terms of production, the drying process of corn silk still relies on direct sunlight. This method requires several days and is highly dependent on weather conditions, making it less efficient. Therefore, the use of a drying machine is highly recommended to ensure product quality, although the equipment is relatively costly. In terms of marketing, product promotion is still limited to the team's Instagram account and word of mouth, so the market reach is not yet optimal. To address these issues, several steps can be taken. First, efforts should be made to provide a drying machine by seeking support from the village government, or entrepreneurship assistance programs. Second, marketing strategies can be expanded by optimizing social media more professionally, such as creating regular promotional content, collaborating with local influencers, and utilizing online marketplaces. Through these efforts, the EKOTHE program can improve production efficiency and broaden its market reach, thereby ensuring more sustainable benefits for the community of Serut Village.

## **Discussion**

The use of corn silk waste to create Ekothe herbal tea is an innovation in processing agricultural byproducts to increase their utility value. Corn silk, often considered waste and discarded by farmers due to its apparent uselessness, actually contains many beneficial compounds, such as flavonoids, tannins,

saponins, and vitamin C. These compounds in corn silk are beneficial for maintaining kidney health, promoting urination, and acting as natural antioxidants (Arianti et al., 2024; Amin & Guspiana, 2025). Processing corn silk waste into herbal tea not only provides health benefits but also supports the principle of environmentally friendly waste management.

The EKOTHE program initiative successfully transformed what was previously considered waste—corn silk—into a high-value product: herbal tea. By utilizing a local agricultural byproduct, the program increased the value of the village's corn production, enabling farmers to diversify their income sources (Hermalena et al., 2024; Mustapa et al., 2025). This shift from selling raw corn to processed herbal tea demonstrates how agricultural waste can be transformed into a profitable and sustainable product, contributing to economic growth and increasing the village's competitiveness in the market. However, despite this progress, reliance on raw corn sales remains a barrier, highlighting the need for innovation and ongoing capacity-building efforts.

The EKOTHE program plays a crucial role in community empowerment. It provides hands-on training that equips residents with valuable skills in product processing, marketing, and business management. This empowerment not only enhances participants' self-esteem and independence but also fosters a sense of unity within the community (Wahyudi et al., 2022; Jiao et al., 2022). By encouraging collaboration, the program creates a network of individuals working toward a common goal, which is crucial for the long-term success of community-driven initiatives. The spirit of mutual cooperation generated by the program can serve as a foundation for future entrepreneurial endeavors in the village.

The EKOTHE program fills a crucial gap by providing participants with technical and business knowledge. In addition to learning how to process corn silk into herbal tea, community members gain practical skills in business operations, such as marketing, branding, and sales (Singh et al., 2021; Hajar et al., 2021). These skills are crucial for transforming local initiatives into sustainable businesses. The emphasis on entrepreneurship education prepares participants not only for independent businesses but also for collaboration through group ventures, thus fostering a more inclusive local economy.

The research makes a valuable contribution to knowledge on rural development and creative economy models. By focusing on transforming agricultural waste into valuable products, the EKOTHE program offers a practical example of how local resources can be maximized for economic, social, and environmental benefits. The research's implications are broad, as it provides a model that can be applied to other rural communities with similar agricultural backgrounds. The program's success in enhancing economic resilience, fostering community empowerment, and contributing to environmental sustainability demonstrates the potential of creative economy initiatives in rural settings.

## CONCLUSION

Corn silk tea contains bioactive compounds with antioxidant properties that can support human health. By introducing this herbal tea as an alternative healthy beverage, the program not only raises awareness of healthier lifestyles but also ensures that the community enjoys direct health benefits from consuming high-quality, locally sourced products. Processing corn silk into herbal tea through the EKOTHE program has proven effective in transforming agricultural waste into useful and marketable products. The program not only creates innovative business opportunities but also promotes economic independence for the community of Serut Village and improves residents' skills in processing and utilizing waste from their local resources, namely corn husks. With proper training, production, and marketing support, EKOTHE has the potential to become a village's leading product and contribute to strengthening the local creative economy. This herbal tea product can become a new economic identity for Serut Village.

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