

Praedial Larceny and Its Psychological and Socio-Cultural Influence on Jamaican Farmers

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Abstract: Praedial larceny which involves stealing agricultural produce and livestock continues to be a persistent problem in Jamaica that damages agricultural output and destroys farmers' income and threatens the country's food security. The practice of praedial larceny developed from colonial times and worsened through modern social inequalities to become a widespread and mentally distressing problem for Jamaican farming communities. This research examines praedial larceny through psychological and socio-cultural lenses to study its historical development and public perceptions and evaluate present-day legal restrictions. The research uses a mixed-methods design which integrates both qualitative interviews and focus group discussions with quantitative survey data from farmers and agricultural science educators and law enforcement officials and rural residents. The research reveals both major financial losses of JMD \$25 billion in 2024 and psychological impacts that include anxiety elevation and distrust growth and social fragmentation. The study investigates how stakeholders understand current legal systems while collecting opinions about prevention methods from local communities. The research focuses on the direct experiences of those impacted to develop policy changes and community-based solutions which will reduce praedial larceny effectively. The research findings will help create responsive enforcement systems which strengthen Jamaica's agricultural resilience through context-specific legislative mechanisms.

Keywords: Praedial larceny, Agricultural Security; Rural Crime Prevention; Surveillance Technology; Farm Traceability Systems.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Definition and Background of Praedial Larceny in Jamaica

The theft of agricultural produce and livestock and farming inputs constitutes praedial larceny which endangers Jamaica's rural economy and food security and social stability. The unique nature of praedial larceny involves stealing agricultural products which sustain rural economies because it occurs in distant areas with minimal police presence and restricted legal access (Ganpat, & Issac, 2018). The crime includes stealing market-ready goods such as yams and sugarcane and poultry together with livestock and irrigation tools and fertilizers which sustain long-term farm productivity.

Praedial larceny in Jamaica stems from its colonial past and demonstrates the existing social and political disparities regarding land ownership and rural monitoring and legal rights. The widespread acceptance of this criminal activity within farming communities has established a silent culture of retaliation which makes it harder to implement mitigation strategies (Thomas-Hope, 2017). The justice system lacks farmer trust while fear of retaliation and prosecution futility prevents them from reporting theft incidents. The problem damages both individual economic stability and the national drive for

agricultural development and food independence (Atalor, 2024). The systemic nature of praedial larceny in rural areas requires an interdisciplinary approach that combines psychological and legal and socio-cultural elements to create effective legislation and community-based interventions.

1.2 Historical Roots and Colonial Legacy

The practice of praedial larceny in Jamaica developed from the colonial era when the plantation economy enforced forced labor and economic inequality and land dispossession in rural areas. The lack of land ownership rights and freedom for enslaved Africans during slavery and indentureship periods led them to practice hidden forms of resistance through crop theft and property sabotage. The colonial authorities punished these acts but the oppressed people viewed them as necessary acts of resistance against their exploitative situation (Trotman, 1986). The ongoing social and political dynamics transformed agricultural theft into a form of resistance rather than a criminal act. After emancipation the freed people of Jamaica faced ongoing structural disadvantages because they were prevented from obtaining land and capital (Ajayi, et al., 2024). The lack of access to land led to the development of an unofficial economic system which included agricultural theft and bartering as survival strategies for rural poverty (Harrison, 1988). The colonial system established a lasting distrust between rural communities and law enforcement because it focused on protecting elite property rights instead of serving communal justice.

Praedial larceny exists as a historical phenomenon because the colonial system established rural disenfranchisement as an institutional practice (Imoh, et al., 2024). The historical legacy continues to influence modern-day perspectives and creates obstacles for law enforcement while causing psychological distress to farmers who doubt the justice system's commitment to their interests.

1.3 Relevance to National Food Security and Economic Development

Praedial larceny interferes with Jamaica's drive toward national food security and economic growth by damaging agricultural sustainability and rural productivity. The domestic agricultural sector's role in supporting nutritional needs and reducing food imports makes praedial larceny a fundamental barrier to achieving self-sufficiency. The ongoing theft of farm products and livestock decreases agricultural output while disrupting delivery systems and elevating farming costs which threatens the stability of domestic food systems (Mohammadi, et al., 2022) as shown in figure 1. The inability of farmers to distribute their products reliably damages national efforts to fight hunger and malnutrition.

The economic impact of praedial larceny reaches further than individual farmers because it affects national productivity measurements. The agricultural sector of Jamaica which employs more than 18% of the workforce experiences substantial yearly financial damage because of theft-related interruptions. Smallholder farmers according to Isaac, et al., (2017) endure most of these losses which results in reduced agricultural investments and decreased rural employment opportunities (Azonuche, & Enyejo, 2024). The practice discourages young people from pursuing careers in agriculture which threatens the sustainability of farming as a sustainable profession. The practice of praedial larceny creates instability in microeconomic farming operations while obstructing national goals to decrease food imports and support rural development and build resilience against global food crises.



Figure 1: Picture of Smallholder Farmers Harvesting Crops in Rural Jamaica – A Vital Force Behind National Food Security Threatened by Praedial Larceny (Editorial Board, 2024).

Figure 1 shows a group of rural farmers engaged in manual harvesting on a lush, densely planted green field, illustrating the labor-intensive nature of small-scale agriculture that underpins Jamaica's domestic food production system. The individuals are bent over rows of crops, meticulously collecting produce, while one person in the foreground carries a large woven basket filled with freshly harvested green beans—highlighting the direct contribution of such efforts to the national food supply. This scene reflects the backbone of Jamaica's agricultural economy, where smallholder farmers play a pivotal role in sustaining food security and reducing dependence on imports. However, this visually productive and orderly environment is frequently destabilized by praedial larceny, which undermines farmers' ability to consistently deliver products to the market. The collective labor investment evident in the image becomes economically vulnerable when theft disrupts harvest cycles, inflates operating costs, and leads to financial losses that discourage reinvestment in future crop cycles. Moreover, such disruptions have broader implications for rural employment and youth retention in agriculture, threatening the sustainability of farming as a livelihood. The labor-intensive nature of the work depicted contrasts sharply with the instability caused by recurring theft, which threatens to erode the resilience of farming communities. The ongoing risk of praedial larceny deters youth engagement in agriculture, impairs rural employment, and undermines national strategies aimed at achieving food self-sufficiency and economic growth. The image, therefore, not only portrays the hard work and community effort invested in food production but also underscores what is at stake when agricultural theft remains unaddressed.

1.4 Statement of the Problem

The agricultural sector of Jamaica continues to experience praedial larceny as a long-standing and damaging problem despite multiple legislative changes and security measures. Farmers experience both major economic losses and emotional exhaustion and social mistrust and community disintegration. The problem worsens because rural law enforcement faces systemic weaknesses that result from insufficient patrol coverage and insufficient investigative resources which enable perpetrators to operate with near impunity (Ganpat, & Issac, 2018). Farmers from isolated and underserved communities avoid reporting theft because they fear both retaliation and doubt the effectiveness of police responses. The ongoing problem of praedial larceny reveals a critical gap between official policies and the actual experiences of rural producers. The Agricultural Produce Act along with other legislative instruments fail to deter theft effectively because of low conviction rates and extended procedural delays (Fath, 2014). Current enforcement methods fail to consider both the psychological effects and social cultural aspects that exist in rural communities. The research problem extends beyond theft to include the institutional breakdowns which prevent effective long-term solutions. The solution to praedial larceny demands a deep comprehension of its complex effects and the development of policy frameworks that adapt to specific contexts.

1.5 Research Questions and Objectives

This study seeks to interrogate the persistent issue of praedial larceny in Jamaica by examining its historical roots, current manifestations, and the psychological and socio-cultural toll it inflicts on farming communities. The research is driven by the need to bridge the gap between policy formulation and the lived realities of rural farmers who endure repeated economic and emotional distress due to agricultural theft.

The primary research questions guiding this investigation are:

1. What are the historical and socio-cultural factors contributing to the persistence of praedial larceny in Jamaica?
2. How does praedial larceny psychologically impact affected farmers and their communities?
3. To what extent are farmers aware of existing legislative measures and enforcement mechanisms?
4. What are the perceived strengths and limitations of current anti-praedial larceny initiatives from the perspective of stakeholders?
5. What policy interventions and community-based strategies do stakeholders believe would effectively address this issue?

The overarching objective of this study is to explore the multi-dimensional nature of praedial larceny, with an emphasis on its psychological, legal, and socio-cultural implications. Specific goals include;

1. To analyze the historical and socio-cultural conditions that have influenced the normalization and endurance of praedial larceny in Jamaica.
2. To assess the psychological consequences of praedial larceny on farmers, including stress, fear, and social mistrust within rural communities.

3. To evaluate the level of awareness and understanding among farmers regarding existing laws and enforcement mechanisms aimed at curbing praedial larceny.
4. To investigate stakeholder perspectives on the effectiveness, gaps, and enforcement challenges associated with current anti-praedial larceny measures.
5. To identify and recommend practical, stakeholder-informed policy interventions and grassroots strategies for reducing the incidence and impact of praedial larceny in Jamaica.

1.6 Significance of the Study

The research findings will help advance academic knowledge and policy development and grassroots understanding of praedial larceny as a complex threat to Jamaican agricultural stability and rural economic stability. The research study provides an advanced understanding of this enduring problem by analyzing psychological and socio-cultural elements which goes past economic data to include farmer welfare and institutional trust and community relationships. The research addresses essential knowledge gaps in current literature by demonstrating how historical factors and enforcement weaknesses and personal experiences create conditions for agricultural theft to continue. The research results will help policymakers and law enforcement agencies and agricultural stakeholders understand rural community challenges to develop better interventions which address cultural and psychological needs. The research platform enables farmers to direct national discussions and reform initiatives which support Jamaica's objectives for food security and sustainable rural development and social unity.

1.7 Structure of the Paper

The research divides into six sections to conduct an extensive evaluation of praedial larceny alongside its psychological and socio-cultural effects on Jamaican farmers. The Introduction section provides background information before defining praedial larceny and tracing its colonial history while explaining its importance for national food security and rural development. The research questions together with objectives and significance and rationale form the basis of this study. The Literature Review evaluates academic research about agricultural theft through historical and psychological and socio-legal perspectives to identify theoretical gaps which guide the analytical framework. The Methodology section explains the mixed-methods research design through descriptions of data collection instruments and participant selection procedures and analytical methods for interpretation. The Findings and Discussion section reveals key themes extracted from interviews and focus groups and survey responses which show how farmers experience praedial larceny and their views on legislation and social effects of the crime. The research findings receive their translation into implementable recommendations for legislation and law enforcement and community-based strategies in the Policy Implications and Recommendations section. The study concludes by summarizing its main findings while proposing future research directions to support evidence-based policy development and sustainable agricultural resilience in Jamaica.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Historical and Contemporary Perspectives on Praedial Larceny

The evolution of praedial larceny in Jamaica must be understood through both its historical roots and current socio-economic expressions. In the colonial period, agricultural theft often symbolized resistance to the plantation economy, where enslaved and later indentured laborers were systematically deprived of land and autonomy. These acts were not merely criminalized behaviors but reflections of rural contestation against imposed structures of economic oppression (Campbell, 2022). The persistence of this crime post-independence illustrates how praedial larceny has morphed from symbolic resistance to a normalized feature of rural livelihoods, exacerbated by structural inequities and weak institutional frameworks.

In contemporary Jamaica, praedial larceny continues to thrive within informal rural economies shaped by poverty, unemployment, and fragmented law enforcement (Ononiwu, et al., 2025). The blurred lines between subsistence activity and criminal behavior complicate regulatory interventions and often lead to community silence or complicity (Salazar-Xirinachs, & Chacaltana, 2018). Additionally, the informal networks that facilitate stolen produce sales remain resilient, sustained by market demand and limited traceability mechanisms. As a result, praedial larceny is no longer just an agricultural issue but a complex socio-economic phenomenon requiring a multidimensional policy response grounded in both historical awareness and current developmental realities (Atalor, 2019).

2.2 Psychological Impacts of Agricultural Theft on Farmers

The psychological impacts of praedial larceny on farmers particularly Jamaican farmers extend beyond economic losses to deeply affect their emotional well-being, personal identity, and sense of safety. Farmers subjected to repeated agricultural theft often experience chronic stress, anxiety, and symptoms of depression due to the unpredictability and perceived helplessness of their situation (Gregoire, 2002) as shown in figure 2. For many, the farm is not merely a place of work but a space of personal investment and legacy. The violation of that space through theft generates feelings of powerlessness, vulnerability, and in some cases, trauma, particularly among smallholder farmers who operate on thin margins.

The cumulative psychological burden manifests in heightened irritability, sleep disturbances, and a breakdown of trust within rural communities, as suspicion often falls on neighbors or local actors (Donnermeyer, 2018). This erosion of social cohesion further isolates farmers and discourages collective action or reporting of crimes. In many cases, victims withdraw from community interactions or even exit agricultural production entirely, resulting in long-term consequences for mental health and rural stability (Ononiwu, et al., 2023). Addressing the psychological toll of praedial larceny requires holistic intervention models that integrate mental health services, peer support systems, and legal protections into agricultural policy frameworks.



Figure 2: Picture of Farmer Surveys Damaged Cassava Field as a Stark Reminder of the Emotional and Economic Toll of Praedial Larceny (Ministry of Agriculture, 2023).

Figure 2 shows a solitary farmer walking through a devastated cassava field, with uprooted stems and broken branches scattered across the ground—clear evidence of recent theft or destruction. This visual captures the aftermath of praedial larceny and its profound psychological toll on the affected farmer. The individual's posture, with slow, deliberate steps and head slightly bowed, suggests emotional exhaustion, possibly from repeated exposure to theft-related losses. Such experiences often lead to chronic stress, anxiety, and a diminished sense of agency, as farmers struggle to secure their livelihoods in environments where legal protection is limited and enforcement is weak. The disarray in the field, contrasting sharply with the labor that would have gone into planting and maintaining it, symbolizes the psychological disillusionment many farmers face when their efforts are nullified by criminal acts. This scene illustrates how praedial larceny contributes to emotional burnout, social isolation, and even eventual withdrawal from agriculture, particularly among vulnerable smallholder farmers. The psychological burden extends beyond the immediate incident, affecting long-term decision-making, economic resilience, and mental health—ultimately undermining the sustainability of rural farming communities in Jamaica.

2.3 Socio-Cultural Factors Influencing Community Responses

The socio-cultural context within which praedial larceny occurs in Jamaica significantly shapes how rural communities respond to and internalize the issue. In many farming areas, communal bonds are strong and deeply rooted in extended family ties, shared history, and reciprocal labor practices (Ijiga, et al., 2024). This closeness, however, often fosters a reluctance to report perpetrators, who are sometimes relatives, neighbors, or childhood acquaintances (Morris, 2010). The fear of ostracization, retaliation, or being labeled a “sellout” contributes to a culture of silence, where justice is subverted by communal loyalty.

Moreover, local responses are often shaped by informal justice systems that prioritize internal conflict resolution over formal legal interventions. Community members may resort to warnings, restitution requests, or even extrajudicial punishment as alternatives to involving law enforcement (Charles, & Beckford, 2012). These mechanisms reflect both a lack of trust in police effectiveness and the influence of cultural norms that emphasize harmony over confrontation. The normalization of theft as a means of survival in economically vulnerable communities further complicates enforcement, as it blurs the line between moral justification and criminality (Ononiwu, et al., 2023). Understanding these socio-cultural dynamics is critical to developing interventions that are not only legally robust but also culturally attuned to the realities of Jamaica’s rural landscape.

2.4 Legislative Frameworks and Their Limitations

The legislative response to praedial larceny in Jamaica is anchored in instruments such as the Agricultural Produce Act and the Praedial Larceny Prevention Programme. While these frameworks were introduced to regulate the movement of agricultural goods and deter theft, their effectiveness remains constrained by enforcement inefficiencies, limited rural policing, and weak judicial follow-through (Ijiga, et al., 2025). The Agricultural Produce Act, for instance, mandates the registration and verification of transported agricultural produce, yet compliance monitoring is sporadic and often bypassed through informal market exchanges (Wallace, 2024). These legal instruments also fail to provide robust victim support mechanisms, leaving farmers to shoulder the economic and emotional burden of theft with minimal institutional assistance.

Moreover, enforcement is hindered by understaffed rural police units, lack of surveillance infrastructure, and low conviction rates, which collectively undermine deterrence (Atalor, et al., 2023). The process of prosecuting praedial larceny cases is often prolonged and inconclusive, diminishing farmers’ trust in the legal system and discouraging formal reporting (Lucia, 2010). Additionally, the absence of coordinated data collection on incidents limits the ability to design evidence-based policies (Azonuche, & Enyejo, 2024). These structural and procedural limitations render existing laws reactive rather than preventive. As a result, legislative reform must go beyond statutory amendments to address systemic enforcement gaps and integrate community-specific interventions.

2.5 Review of Previous Studies and Knowledge Gaps

Prior studies on praedial larceny in Jamaica have focused primarily on economic losses, informal policing strategies, and the general ineffectiveness of legal interventions. Isaac, et al., (2017) document how affected farmers increasingly rely on community vigilance, localized surveillance, and retaliatory action rather than formal reporting due to a prevailing lack of trust in law enforcement. These studies emphasize the operational aspects of crime prevention but often fall short of investigating the deeper psychological and social implications of repeated victimization, especially for small-scale farmers who face chronic insecurity and reduced productivity. Wallace, (2017) contribute to the discourse by linking praedial larceny to social fragmentation and intergenerational tensions within rural communities. However, their research largely treats farmers as passive subjects of theft rather than active agents navigating the legal and cultural complexities of agricultural security. Critically, few empirical studies examine how legislative literacy, emotional fatigue, or cultural perceptions of justice influence farmer behavior and reporting outcomes (Atalor, & Enyejo, 2025). Additionally, limited scholarship integrates mixed-methods approaches capable of capturing the nuanced interplay between socio-cultural values, institutional performance, and mental health impacts (Atalor, 2022). This gap underscores the need for more holistic frameworks that not only quantify losses but also humanize the lived experiences of farmers—thereby enhancing the relevance and effectiveness of future interventions and policies.

Figure 3 presents a structured overview of existing research on praedial larceny and the critical knowledge gaps that justify the current study. On the left, it categorizes prior studies into three main areas: economic impact, which emphasizes the financial losses and disruption to agricultural productivity; informal security measures, which focus on how communities

develop their own non-institutional responses to theft; and social fragmentation, which explores how praedial larceny contributes to mistrust and division in rural areas. On the right side, the diagram highlights key research gaps that have emerged from these studies. These include a lack of investigation into the psychological effects of theft on farmers, the tendency to portray farmers as passive victims rather than active agents, the underutilization of mixed-methods approaches that could yield richer insights, and the insufficient exploration of farmers' legal literacy and engagement with formal justice systems. Finally, the top of the diagram outlines the implications of these gaps, highlighting the need for human-centered analysis that addresses mental health, strengthens participatory legal education, and employs interdisciplinary strategies. This visual summary clarifies how the current research contributes to filling empirical and theoretical voids in the understanding of praedial larceny in Jamaica.

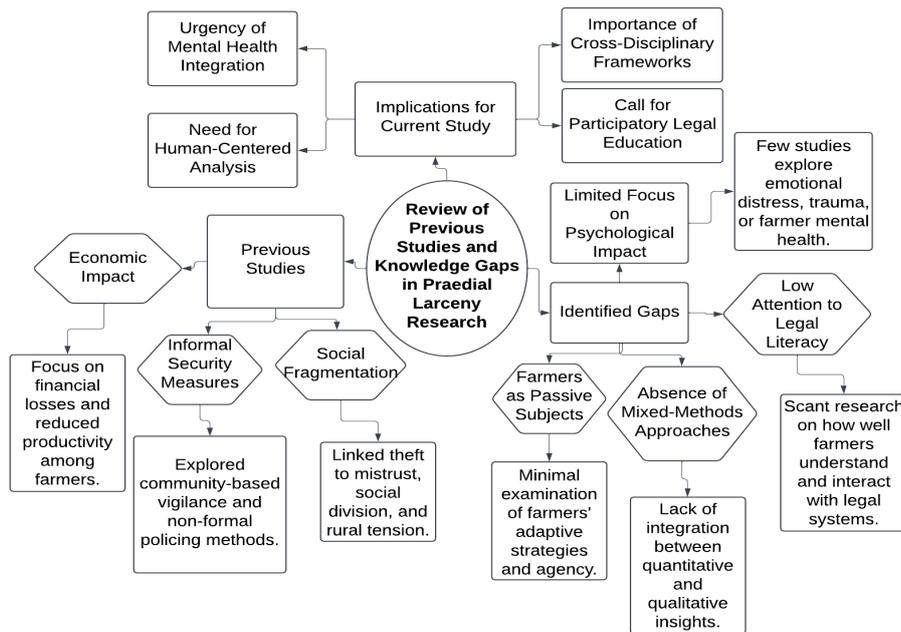


Figure 3: Diagram Illustration of Prior Research Focus and Existing Knowledge Gaps in Praedial Larceny Studies

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design and Rationale (Mixed-Methods Approach)

This study adopts a mixed-methods research design to comprehensively examine the psychological and socio-cultural impacts of praedial larceny on Jamaican farmers. The rationale for using this approach lies in its capacity to integrate the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative methods, allowing for a more nuanced understanding of a complex, multi-dimensional issue. The qualitative component involves in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with farmers, agricultural educators, and law enforcement officers to capture the lived experiences, emotional responses, and community-level dynamics associated with praedial larceny. These narratives offer context-specific insights that statistical data alone cannot provide, especially regarding psychological effects and informal social norms. Complementing this, the quantitative component utilizes structured surveys distributed among a broader population of farmers and rural residents to gather measurable data on the frequency of theft, perceived effectiveness of legal interventions, and awareness of anti-praedial larceny policies. This dual approach enables triangulation of findings, ensuring the reliability of results and uncovering correlations between theft experiences and mental health stressors. The mixed-methods design is particularly suited for this research because it accommodates the study's interdisciplinary focus on historical legacies, socio-legal structures, and individual psychological outcomes, ultimately producing a richer, more actionable body of knowledge for policymakers and stakeholders.

3.2 Participant Selection: Farmers, Educators, Law Enforcement, and Rural Residents

The selection of participants for this study was guided by the need to capture diverse, yet interrelated perspectives on the phenomenon of praedial larceny. Four key stakeholder groups were identified: farmers, agricultural science educators, law enforcement officers, and rural residents. These groups were chosen based on their direct or indirect involvement with the

consequences, prevention, and policy implications of agricultural theft. Farmers were prioritized as primary participants because they are the most directly affected—both economically and psychologically—by praedial larceny. Their lived experiences provide critical insights into the frequency, emotional toll, and adaptive responses to theft. Agricultural science educators were included for their expertise in farming systems, knowledge transfer, and policy education. They offer a pedagogical and institutional perspective on how the issue is addressed within formal agricultural training. Law enforcement officers were selected for their role in crime prevention, investigation, and enforcement of praedial larceny legislation. Their input helps evaluate procedural constraints and practical limitations in policing rural theft. Finally, rural residents—including non-farming individuals—were chosen to provide community-level perspectives on social norms, informal justice systems, and the cultural underpinnings of theft tolerance or resistance. This purposeful sampling strategy ensures a holistic understanding of the multi-stakeholder ecosystem surrounding praedial larceny in Jamaica.

3.3 Data Collection Tools: Interviews, Focus Groups, and Surveys

To obtain a comprehensive and multidimensional understanding of praedial larceny and its impacts, this study employed three primary data collection tools: semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and structured surveys as presented in table 1. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with individual farmers, agricultural educators, and police officers. These interviews allowed for flexible yet targeted dialogue, enabling participants to share personal experiences, perceptions of the justice system, and views on current legislative measures. The semi-structured format facilitated probing of sensitive topics such as emotional distress, coping mechanisms, and institutional trust without constraining participant expression. Focus group discussions were held with selected farmers and rural residents to explore communal perspectives, social norms, and informal responses to agricultural theft. These group sessions encouraged dynamic interaction and collective reflection, revealing patterns of behavior, shared concerns, and cultural influences that may not emerge in individual interviews. They were particularly useful in capturing the social fabric of farming communities and the unspoken codes that shape responses to theft. Structured surveys complemented the qualitative tools by providing standardized data from a larger and more geographically diverse sample. The surveys included both closed- and open-ended questions designed to quantify the prevalence of praedial larceny, awareness of laws, and perceived enforcement effectiveness, while also capturing supplementary narratives to enrich interpretation.

Table 1: Summary of Data Collection Tools – Interviews, Focus Groups, and Surveys

Tool	Purpose	Application	Insights Gained
Semi-Structured Interviews	Capture personal experiences, perceptions, and emotional impacts	Conducted with farmers, agricultural educators, and law enforcement officers	In-depth understanding of psychological toll, enforcement gaps, and lived realities
Focus Group Discussions	Explore collective attitudes, cultural norms, and community responses	Held with groups of farmers and rural residents in affected areas	Revealed social tolerance, community silence, and informal justice practices
Structured Surveys	Gather quantifiable data on frequency, awareness, and perceptions	Distributed among broader rural population, including non-farming residents	Identified patterns in reporting behavior, legal awareness, and enforcement perceptions
Open-Ended Survey Items	Supplement statistical data with narrative responses	Embedded within structured surveys for mixed data collection	Provided anecdotal context to validate and enrich qualitative themes

3.4 Data Analysis Strategy: Content Analysis and Thematic Coding

The data analysis strategy for this study is rooted in qualitative content analysis and thematic coding to ensure systematic interpretation of both textual and numerical data. For the qualitative data derived from interviews and focus groups, an inductive content analysis approach was used. This involved transcribing audio recordings, carefully reviewing transcripts, and organizing data into manageable units. From these units, patterns and recurrent ideas were identified and categorized into themes reflecting participants' experiences, perceptions, and socio-cultural interpretations of praedial larceny. Thematic coding was applied using a grounded approach, allowing themes to emerge organically from the data rather than being imposed a priori. Codes were developed iteratively through multiple readings of the transcripts and refined as patterns became clearer. Themes such as psychological distress, trust erosion, community silence, and perceptions of legal inefficacy

were developed to reflect the multidimensional impact of agricultural theft. Quantitative survey responses were analyzed using descriptive statistics to identify trends in participants' awareness of legislation, reporting behavior, and perception of enforcement success. Where appropriate, open-ended survey responses were also thematically coded and integrated with qualitative findings to triangulate data sources. This dual-layered analysis provided a rich, cohesive narrative that aligns with the study's mixed-methods framework and research objectives.

3.5 Ethical Considerations and Limitations

Ethical integrity was central to the design and implementation of this study, particularly given the sensitivity surrounding agricultural theft and the vulnerability of participants. Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant institutional review board prior to data collection. Participants were informed of the study's objectives, their voluntary participation, and their right to withdraw at any stage without penalty. Informed consent was secured through written agreements, and for participants with literacy limitations, verbal consent was documented. Anonymity and confidentiality were strictly maintained by assigning coded identifiers and securely storing all digital and physical data. Given the emotional distress that may arise from discussing traumatic or stigmatized experiences such as repeated theft or mistrust in law enforcement, appropriate psychological support resources were made available to participants when needed. Care was also taken during interviews and focus groups to create a safe and respectful environment, allowing participants to express their views freely without fear of judgment or reprisal. Despite rigorous planning, the study has some limitations. These include potential self-reporting bias, limited generalizability due to purposive sampling, and challenges in accessing remote rural communities. Additionally, underreporting due to fear of retaliation may have restricted the depth of some responses. These limitations are acknowledged and considered in the interpretation of the findings.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Historical and Socio-Cultural Drivers of Praedial Larceny

Findings revealed that the persistence of praedial larceny in Jamaica is strongly influenced by historical and socio-cultural conditions, many of which trace back to the colonial era. Participants consistently highlighted that agricultural theft has been normalized within certain communities, rooted in a legacy of dispossession and structural inequality as presented in table 2. Farmers and educators frequently referenced the plantation system, where generations of marginalized groups were denied access to land and capital, forcing them into informal and often illicit survival strategies. This historical context has shaped contemporary attitudes toward property and theft, leading to a perception that praedial larceny, though illegal, is not morally reprehensible in all circumstances.

Discussions with older farmers revealed a pattern of intergenerational exposure to theft, where praedial larceny is viewed as a common and almost expected feature of rural life. This normalization contributes to a culture of silence, as many community members are reluctant to report offenders due to familial connections or fear of social backlash. Some residents justified theft as a response to poverty and unemployment, framing it as a necessary act rather than a crime. These findings underscore that praedial larceny is not only a legal and economic issue, but a deeply embedded socio-cultural phenomenon that must be addressed through historically informed and community-sensitive strategies.

Table 2: Summary of Historical and Socio-Cultural Drivers of Praedial Larceny

Historical Factors	Cultural Norms	Community Dynamics	Implications
Colonial-era land dispossession and economic inequality	Theft normalized due to survival practices in rural settings	Silence and non-reporting due to familial or social ties	Weak enforcement and tolerance for theft at the community level
Legacy of plantation economy fostered acts of resistance	Generational exposure led to reduced perception of criminality	Suspicion among neighbors erodes trust	Legal deterrents are ineffective in culturally permissive environments
Denial of land ownership to laboring populations	Theft seen as morally justified by some due to poverty	Community loyalty often outweighs legal compliance	Reduces agricultural investment and undermines rural cohesion
Economic exclusion drove informal survival strategies	Social framing of praedial larceny as non-violent offense	Informal justice preferred over state-led prosecution	Long-term destabilization of rural agricultural systems

4.2 Psychological Consequences for Affected Farmers

Findings revealed that praedial larceny imposes significant psychological strain on affected farmers, manifesting as chronic anxiety, frustration, and emotional exhaustion. Many participants described experiencing persistent fear of future theft, especially during harvest periods or at night, which disrupted their sleep and reduced their sense of personal security. This constant vigilance contributed to elevated stress levels and, in some cases, symptoms resembling trauma, particularly among smallholder farmers who lacked the resources to recover quickly from repeated losses. Interviews and focus group discussions also indicated that praedial larceny has eroded trust within farming communities. Farmers expressed suspicion toward neighbors and even family members, creating a climate of isolation and social tension. This breakdown of social cohesion further exacerbated feelings of vulnerability and helplessness, leading some participants to withdraw from community events or agricultural activities altogether.

Several farmers reported feelings of worthlessness and hopelessness, noting that the inability to protect their livelihoods diminished their motivation to continue farming. Younger farmers, in particular, questioned the viability of agriculture as a long-term career, citing psychological burnout as a critical factor. These findings highlight that the emotional toll of praedial larceny extends beyond immediate financial loss, requiring mental health interventions and psychosocial support as part of any comprehensive response.

4.3 Awareness and Interpretation of Legal Frameworks

Findings indicate that awareness and understanding of existing legal frameworks surrounding praedial larceny among farmers and rural residents remain limited and inconsistent. While some participants were familiar with the Agricultural Produce Act and the requirement for produce receipts or movement permits, many admitted uncertainty regarding the scope of the legislation and how it could be effectively enforced in practice as presented in table 3. Several farmers were unclear about the processes for reporting theft or the evidentiary requirements needed to support prosecution, leading to widespread disengagement from the legal system. Participants frequently expressed skepticism about the law's effectiveness, citing minimal enforcement, delayed judicial processes, and low conviction rates as evidence of systemic inefficiency. Law enforcement officers interviewed acknowledged that resource constraints and limited manpower hindered consistent monitoring of produce movement, particularly in remote farming areas. This contributed to a perception that the laws are symbolic rather than operational. Moreover, some farmers interpreted the legal system as favoring perpetrators due to the burden of proof placed on victims and the ease with which stolen goods could be sold in informal markets. These findings reveal a critical gap between legislative intent and rural enforcement realities, highlighting the need for enhanced legal literacy, simplified reporting mechanisms, and localized legal outreach initiatives.

Table 3: Summary of Awareness and Interpretation of Legal Frameworks

Level of Awareness	Perceptions of the Law	Challenges Identified	Implications
Limited understanding of specific legislation	Laws viewed as symbolic rather than practical	Unclear reporting procedures and legal requirements	Farmers disengage from formal justice processes
Some awareness of Agricultural Produce Act	Skepticism about law enforcement effectiveness	Burden of proof placed on farmers with limited documentation	Underreporting and lack of prosecution of praedial larceny cases
Inconsistent knowledge about produce movement permits	Law seen as favoring offenders due to low conviction rates	Inadequate outreach and legal education in rural areas	Weak institutional trust and reliance on informal conflict resolution
Greater awareness among agricultural educators	Legal tools perceived as inaccessible to smallholder farmers	Limited integration of legal literacy into agricultural training	Reduced confidence in policy frameworks and vulnerability to repeated theft

4.4 Stakeholder Perceptions of Policy and Enforcement Effectiveness

Findings demonstrate a broad consensus among stakeholders that current policies and enforcement mechanisms aimed at addressing praedial larceny are largely ineffective. Farmers, educators, and law enforcement officers shared critical views on the limitations of the existing legal framework, citing enforcement inconsistencies, delayed judicial processes, and the

absence of deterrent penalties as core challenges. Farmers noted that even when theft is reported, investigations are often slow or inconclusive, with perpetrators rarely prosecuted or convicted. This perceived impunity has led to frustration and disengagement from formal justice processes. Law enforcement officers acknowledged that their efforts are constrained by resource limitations, inadequate rural patrol coverage, and the difficulty of catching perpetrators in the act due to vast and poorly secured farmlands. Educators emphasized that while some policy reforms have been introduced, such as the requirement for produce movement documentation, implementation is weak and poorly monitored.

Stakeholders also highlighted that current approaches fail to consider the socio-cultural dynamics in rural areas, where community silence and informal justice practices undermine formal enforcement. Overall, these findings suggest that any policy aimed at curbing praedial larceny must go beyond legal amendments to include robust implementation strategies, capacity-building for rural policing, and community-based monitoring systems supported by trust and transparency.

4.5 Community-Based and Policy-Driven Solutions

Findings related to Objective 5 revealed strong stakeholder interest in integrated approaches that combine legislative reform with community-led interventions to address praedial larceny. Farmers, educators, and rural residents consistently emphasized the need for more practical, accessible, and localized solutions. Participants proposed the establishment of community watch groups equipped with mobile communication tools to report suspicious activity in real time. These grassroots surveillance efforts were seen as a critical complement to under-resourced formal policing systems, especially in remote farming areas.

Additionally, stakeholders called for the development of farmer identification systems and produce tagging mechanisms to improve traceability and ownership verification. Suggestions included the use of digital tools such as QR-coded tags, mobile reporting platforms, and GPS-based farm mapping to support real-time monitoring and data sharing. Educators advocated for incorporating anti-praedial larceny awareness into agricultural training curricula, promoting early knowledge of legal rights and reporting procedures among young farmers. From a policy standpoint, there were strong calls for harsher penalties, dedicated praedial larceny courts, and improved coordination between police, agriculture ministries, and local authorities. Participants also recommended regular community engagement forums to rebuild trust between farmers and law enforcement. Collectively, these solutions reflect a demand for collaborative, context-sensitive strategies that empower communities while reinforcing the state's role in agricultural protection.

5. POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Assessment of Current Legislative Gaps

The findings of this study highlight critical gaps in Jamaica's current legislative framework for addressing praedial larceny. While laws such as the Agricultural Produce Act and related enforcement measures exist on paper, their practical application remains weak and inconsistently implemented across rural communities. One major legislative gap lies in the burden of proof, which disproportionately falls on farmers who often lack formal documentation or surveillance to establish ownership and quantify losses. This creates a structural disadvantage for victims and limits successful prosecution. Additionally, the absence of specialized courts or fast-track judicial processes for agricultural crimes contributes to long delays and a lack of legal resolution. Farmers expressed frustration that praedial larceny cases are often deprioritized in the wider criminal justice system, leading to low conviction rates and minimal deterrent effects. Current penalties for offenders are also viewed as insufficient to reflect the economic and psychological damage inflicted on victims. The legislation does not fully address modern traceability needs or incorporate technological solutions for produce tracking and farmer verification. Furthermore, rural law enforcement is inadequately equipped to enforce existing laws, especially in geographically dispersed communities. These legislative deficiencies collectively diminish public confidence in the legal system and reinforce the cycle of underreporting, community silence, and recurring agricultural theft.

5.2 Proposed Policy Reforms

In response to the legislative and enforcement gaps identified in this study, participants proposed several targeted policy reforms aimed at strengthening Jamaica's ability to combat praedial larceny as presented in table 4. A key recommendation was the establishment of specialized praedial larceny courts or dedicated judicial channels to expedite agricultural theft cases and reduce procedural delays. This would ensure that cases are given appropriate priority and handled by personnel familiar with the nuances of agricultural crime. Another proposed reform is the implementation of a national produce traceability system that mandates digital tagging and registration of farm outputs. This system would enhance the

verification of ownership and help authorities intercept stolen goods before they reach markets. Stakeholders also suggested reforming the legal burden of proof to allow for community-based affidavits or cooperative witness reporting, easing the evidentiary pressure on individual farmers. There was also strong support for increasing penalties to reflect the severity of economic and psychological harm suffered by victims. Additionally, policies should mandate stronger collaboration between law enforcement and agricultural agencies through shared databases, joint patrols, and rural intelligence networks. Education-driven reforms, such as community legal awareness campaigns and school-based sensitization, were also proposed to build a culture of prevention and early reporting. These reforms collectively aim to bridge policy with practice, reinforcing protection and justice for rural agricultural communities.

Table 4: Summary of Proposed Policy Reforms

Policy Reform Area	Proposed Measures	Rationale	Expected Outcomes
Judicial System Improvements	Establishment of specialized praedial larceny courts or fast-track judicial channels	Expedite case processing and prioritize agricultural theft cases	Increased conviction rates and legal responsiveness
Produce Traceability and Security	Implementation of national produce tagging and digital farm registries	Enhance verification of ownership and track movement of goods	Deterrence of theft and recovery of stolen produce
Legal Burden Adjustment	Allow use of cooperative witness reporting and community affidavits	Reduce pressure on farmers lacking formal documentation	Improved access to justice for smallholder farmers
Enforcement and Collaboration	Strengthened coordination between law enforcement and agricultural agencies	Improve rural policing and intelligence sharing	More effective surveillance and rapid response to theft incidents
Public Education and Awareness	Community campaigns and school-based sensitization programs	Build legal awareness and shift public norms on theft	Greater community cooperation and preventive behavior

5.3 Community Engagement and Education Strategies

The findings of this study emphasize that sustainable solutions to praedial larceny must include proactive community engagement and education strategies that empower rural populations. Participants identified the lack of consistent outreach, training, and legal awareness as contributing factors to the persistence of theft and underreporting. Community-based education campaigns should therefore be implemented to improve farmers' understanding of their rights, the legal reporting process, and preventive practices. These campaigns should be culturally tailored, using local dialects, community leaders, and accessible formats such as radio programs, town hall meetings, and mobile information units.

Engagement strategies must also focus on building trust between communities and law enforcement. Regular community-police forums can foster dialogue, improve information sharing, and reduce the perception of neglect by authorities. Farmers also proposed peer-led workshops and mentorship networks that share best practices on farm security, cooperative defense strategies, and documentation of agricultural assets.

Furthermore, integrating praedial larceny prevention into school curricula and agricultural training programs will help cultivate a new generation of informed farmers who are better prepared to navigate legal and security systems. Overall, community engagement and education are essential to reshaping social norms, encouraging collective vigilance, and fostering a shared responsibility for safeguarding agricultural livelihoods.

5.4 Integration of Psychological and Socio-Cultural Support Mechanisms

This study revealed that the psychological and socio-cultural impacts of praedial larceny are deeply embedded in the lived experiences of Jamaican farmers, necessitating the integration of targeted support mechanisms into policy and community responses. Participants consistently emphasized the emotional toll of theft, including chronic stress, anxiety, trauma, and social withdrawal. To address these issues, it is essential to embed mental health services within rural extension programs, ensuring that affected farmers have access to counseling, trauma-informed care, and stress management resources. These services should be confidential, locally accessible, and culturally sensitive to reduce stigma and encourage participation.

In addition to psychological care, socio-cultural support mechanisms are vital for rebuilding community trust and social cohesion. Structured community dialogues, facilitated by trained mediators or social workers, can help resolve conflict, restore communal bonds, and reduce retaliatory behavior. Empowering faith-based organizations and cultural leaders to take part in anti-theft initiatives also reinforces the moral rejection of praedial larceny through respected community voices.

Peer support groups and cooperative networks can further strengthen resilience by fostering shared responsibility, emotional solidarity, and collective risk management. Integrating these psychological and socio-cultural components within existing agricultural policies will ensure a more holistic, human-centered approach to reducing the long-term damage caused by praedial larceny.

5.5 Role of Technology and Surveillance in Prevention

The findings of this study highlight the critical need to leverage technology and surveillance systems as integral tools in preventing praedial larceny. Participants identified limited visibility and delayed response times as key enablers of agricultural theft, particularly in remote or poorly monitored farming areas as shown in figure 4. To mitigate these challenges, farmers proposed the use of low-cost, solar-powered surveillance cameras strategically positioned across farmlands to capture real-time footage and deter unauthorized access. These devices can be networked with mobile applications that alert farmers or local patrol units when motion is detected after operational hours.

Additionally, drone surveillance emerged as a promising solution for large-scale farms where physical patrolling is impractical. Drones equipped with thermal imaging and GPS capabilities can conduct regular aerial monitoring, especially during vulnerable periods such as harvest time. Farmers also advocated for the use of digital farm registries and blockchain-based tracking systems to authenticate ownership and establish transparent produce supply chains.

Mobile technology can further enhance response efficiency by enabling rapid reporting through SMS or dedicated apps linked to law enforcement. These digital solutions not only reduce the logistical burden on rural police forces but also empower farmers with tools for self-surveillance and evidence collection. Integrating these technologies into national anti-theft strategies will significantly improve detection, deterrence, and accountability across the agricultural sector.

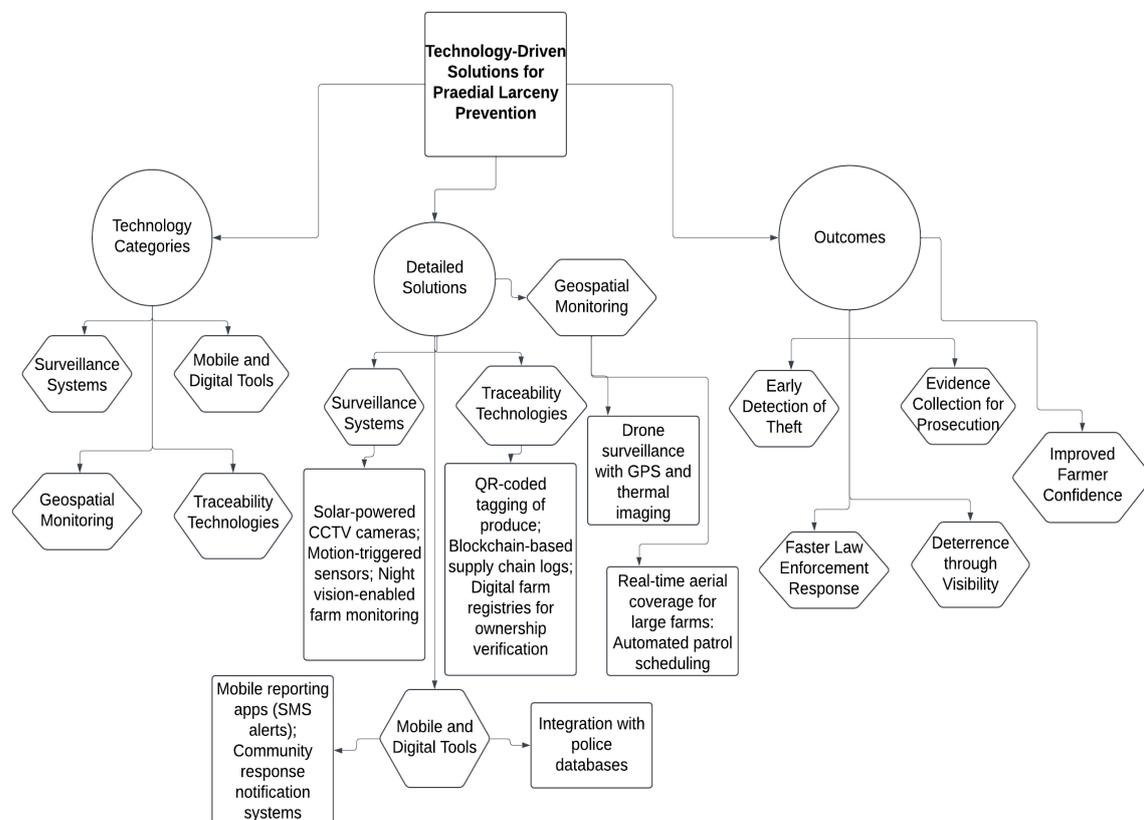


Figure 4: Diagram Illustration of Integrated Technological Solutions for Preventing Praedial Larceny in Jamaican Agriculture

Figure 4 provides a structured overview of how technology and surveillance can be strategically deployed to prevent praedial larceny, organizing the tools into four core categories: surveillance systems, mobile and digital tools, geospatial monitoring, and traceability technologies. Surveillance systems include solar-powered CCTV and motion-triggered cameras designed to monitor farms in real time, even in remote areas. Mobile and digital tools encompass reporting apps and alert systems that allow farmers to communicate theft incidents directly to authorities or community networks. Geospatial monitoring solutions such as drones equipped with GPS and thermal imaging enable real-time aerial surveillance of large farms, allowing for automated patrols and visual coverage that human resources cannot consistently provide. Traceability technologies—such as QR-coded tagging and blockchain-based supply chain systems—serve to authenticate produce ownership and monitor product movement through the agricultural value chain. Together, these tools enhance theft detection, improve response time, support legal evidence collection, and deter would-be offenders through increased visibility. Ultimately, the integration of these technologies fosters a safer agricultural environment, empowering farmers while improving the efficacy and reach of rural law enforcement systems.

5.6 Future Directions for Research and Implementation

Based on the findings of this study, future research should focus on developing a multidisciplinary framework that combines agricultural policy, rural sociology, criminology, and mental health to better understand and combat praedial larceny. There is a pressing need for longitudinal studies that examine the long-term psychological and economic effects of agricultural theft on smallholder farmers, particularly in relation to generational farming continuity and rural youth retention. Such research would inform the development of resilience-building interventions tailored to at-risk farming communities. Further investigation is also needed into the effectiveness of technology-based interventions, such as mobile surveillance systems, produce tracking applications, and remote sensor networks. Pilot programs should be implemented in high-theft zones to assess their practicality, cost-efficiency, and adoption rates. Additionally, there is scope to explore the scalability of community-led reporting models and peer surveillance networks to enhance grassroots enforcement capacity.

On the implementation side, future strategies must prioritize partnerships between government, private technology firms, farmer cooperatives, and academic institutions to design and deploy context-specific anti-theft tools. Policy simulations and scenario planning should also be used to test the impact of proposed legislative reforms under different enforcement conditions. A data-driven, community-empowered, and culturally attuned approach will be essential for sustainable progress in reducing praedial larceny across Jamaica.

6. CONCLUSION

6.1 Summary of Key Findings

This study uncovered the complex, multi-dimensional nature of praedial larceny in Jamaica, revealing that it is not solely a legal or economic issue but a phenomenon deeply rooted in historical, psychological, and socio-cultural dynamics. Findings demonstrated that colonial-era land dispossession and structural inequality have contributed to the normalization of agricultural theft within rural communities. Farmers frequently described praedial larceny as a culturally embedded practice shaped by historical marginalization, social tolerance, and survival-driven behaviors.

The psychological impacts were equally profound. Farmers reported chronic anxiety, emotional fatigue, and community mistrust resulting from repeated thefts and limited legal recourse. These experiences have led to social withdrawal and declining participation in agricultural activities, particularly among younger farmers. The study also found that awareness of legislative frameworks was limited, and enforcement mechanisms were widely viewed as ineffective due to procedural delays, minimal deterrents, and resource constraints.

Stakeholders expressed dissatisfaction with current policies and recommended reforms, including produce traceability systems, dedicated agricultural courts, and increased penalties. Importantly, community engagement, mental health support, and surveillance technology were identified as crucial components of any sustainable solution. Overall, the findings highlight the need for a holistic, community-centered approach that integrates legal, psychological, and technological strategies to effectively mitigate praedial larceny and protect rural livelihoods.

6.2 Reaffirmation of the Study's Significance

This study holds significant value in advancing a comprehensive understanding of praedial larceny as a critical threat to Jamaica's agricultural sustainability, food security, and rural stability. By exploring not only the economic dimensions but

also the historical, psychological, and socio-cultural contexts, the research provides a nuanced framework for interpreting and responding to agricultural theft. The study's findings highlight that praedial larceny is not an isolated criminal act but a manifestation of deep-rooted structural challenges, including land inequity, weak legal enforcement, and the erosion of social trust in rural communities.

Its significance lies in uncovering the lived experiences of farmers who, beyond suffering economic losses, endure sustained psychological distress, reduced social cohesion, and declining trust in legal institutions. The study elevates these realities into the policy discourse, urging stakeholders to prioritize interventions that go beyond punitive enforcement and embrace prevention, education, and psychosocial support.

Furthermore, the study provides a roadmap for practical reform, including the integration of surveillance technologies, legislative modernization, and community-based governance. By reaffirming the centrality of farmer resilience, legal empowerment, and institutional accountability, this research serves as a critical contribution to both academic literature and national policy-making aimed at eradicating praedial larceny and protecting Jamaica's agricultural future.

6.3 Concluding Remarks on the Pathway Forward for Addressing Praedial Larceny

Addressing praedial larceny in Jamaica demands a multidimensional and coordinated strategy that reflects the complex interplay of historical, legal, psychological, and socio-cultural factors identified in this study. The pathway forward must begin with policy reforms that not only strengthen enforcement but also correct institutional inefficiencies—such as the slow judicial process and lack of produce traceability. A dedicated legal framework supported by agricultural courts, digital farm registries, and evidence-friendly reporting systems is essential to improving conviction rates and restoring farmer confidence in the justice system.

Equally important is the integration of rural mental health services to address the emotional burden experienced by victims. Psychosocial interventions must be embedded within agricultural support programs to enhance resilience and prevent farmer withdrawal from production. Community engagement must be prioritized through education, trust-building forums, and partnerships with local leaders, enabling rural populations to actively participate in prevention and response efforts. Finally, the deployment of technology—such as surveillance drones, motion-triggered cameras, and mobile reporting platforms—can revolutionize the detection and deterrence of theft in both smallholder and commercial farms. These solutions must be scalable, cost-effective, and integrated with grassroots knowledge systems. Collectively, this comprehensive approach charts a sustainable and context-sensitive path to reducing praedial larceny and strengthening Jamaica's rural agricultural landscape.

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