

Culture and Rice Stocks: How The Kasepuhan Gelaralam Maintains Food Reserves since the 14th Century

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ABSTRACT

The issue of food has recently gained significant prominence in global discourse, becoming a primary focus of the United Nations (UN)'s agenda through the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) program, particularly Target 2. The prevalence of food-related issues in Indonesia is a multifaceted challenge, particularly given the country's diverse population demographics (Rozaki, 2021). Conversely, studies have indicated that indigenous knowledge systems in Indonesia hold the potential to address challenges related to food security. One notable example is the *Kasepuhan Ciptagelar* community (Dirgahayu et al., 2023). This indigenous community has garnered recognition for its local wisdom in effectively managing food resources. It is regarded as having the capacity to overcome food-related challenges within its own community. According to several articles, this community possesses sufficient food reserves to meet its own needs for decades (Roosyana, 2021; Pitaloka, 2025). As elucidated in the foregoing discussion, this article aims to illustrate how the indigenous community is represented by the aforementioned claim through their quotidian practices and cultural traditions.

The purpose of this article is to provide straightforward explanations for the claims that this community possesses plentiful food reserves. It is important to note that the arguments and explanations presented in this article are based solely on the culture and practices of the *Kasepuhan Ciptagelar* community. These data have been obtained from various sources.

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach to provide a comprehensive overview of the practices implemented within the community. The data analyzed in this study were obtained using a triangulation approach from various sources, including interviews, observations, and secondary data sources such as articles and the internet.

Kasepuhan Ciptagelar (as of 2022, it has changed to *Kasepuhan Gelaralam*) is a traditional Sundanese community residing around the *Halimun-Salak* Mountains in *Sukabumi*, West Java Province. This community is widely recognized for its association with a culture centered on agricultural practices, particularly rice farming. This indigenous community has existed since 1368 AD and continues to exist at the time of this article's release. Since its inception, *Kasepuhan Gelaralam* has practiced an agricultural culture in its daily life, primarily related to rice and involving harmonious interaction with the environment.

This community holds a sacred belief that the earth represents the figure of "Mother," a concept that is deeply esteemed and safeguarded by the community. This belief significantly impacts the interaction dynamics between the community and the "Earth," which is analogous to the relationship between a "Child" and "Mother." They believe that damaging the environment means "hurting" Mother, which is why activities that damage the environment are prohibited in *Kasepuhan Gelaralam*. This cultural belief about the "Mother of Earth" exerts a significant influence on the practice of rice cultivation because it holds that a mother can only give birth once a year, and this belief is reflected in the annual cycle of rice farming. In *Kasepuhan Gelaralam*, farming is regarded as a form of worship and is deeply considered to be sacred. This community has its own unique customs and rules that govern this practice. Analogous to the care and nurturance bestowed upon a pregnant mother, rice fields are meticulously cultivated and nourished, ensuring their growth and eventual yield of rice.

In *Kasepuhan Gelaralam*, the results of rice farming activities and production are formally documented in a traditional ceremony known as *Ponggokan*. This ceremony, which spans three days, is

a significant cultural event in the region. During this period, all *Kasepuhan* residents are obliged to report their rice production to *Kasepuhan* through traditional representatives or village leaders in each village.

Table 1. Rice Production in *Kasepuhan Gelaralam*

Description	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Surplus of Rice Prod. (in Month)	2,70	7,33	4,15	10,04	(1,58)

The estimation is based on a comprehensive set of data, including information from interviews, food production data, demographic data, the rice recovery rate from traditional rice milling methods, and food consumption requirements data (Statistics Agency of Indonesia, 2024). The data in Table 1 indicates that from 2020 to 2023, rice production in *Kasepuhan* exhibited a surplus, while in 2024, a deficit was observed. According to the information obtained, the deficit was attributed to a technical limitation in the system of record-keeping. Specifically, the *pongokan* and deficit figures were only reflected in the food production census data, which did not indicate a production insufficiency. The information acquired during the course of the interviews indicated that a surplus of rice had consistently been produced each year for a long time, with the understanding that the annual yield was limited to a single cycle of production.

This indigenous community places rice in a high and sacred position because they believe that rice is a gift from their "Mother," who is also the source of life for the community (the main source of food). Consequently, they are forbidden from selling their "source of life." The practice of trading rice is perceived as a profound insult to the gift bestowed by their "Mother," and as a perilous act that jeopardizes their very existence. Consequently, all rice produced is consumed domestically and never traded. This prohibition is one of the factors that explains the large food stocks in *Kasepuhan Gelaralam*, according to several sources.

The norms, perspectives on natural environments, and cultural as well as agricultural practices of the *Kasepuhan Gelaralam* community have been in place for approximately six centuries, since the community's establishment around the 14th century AD. This also signifies that rice production in *Kasepuhan*, which is purported to perpetually exceed demand, has been accompanied by a ban on the sale of rice for over 600 cycles. This has undoubtedly resulted in a substantial accumulation of rice reserves, thereby ensuring ample provisions to meet their food needs. This assertion provides the fundamental rationale behind *Kasepuhan Gelaralam*'s claim to possess abundant food reserves, sufficient to sustain their community for decades.

Keywords: *Food production, community, culture*

Acknowledgement

This article is a concise summary based on data and information obtained by the author to address the claims regarding the community under review. This highlights the need for further research to gain a more comprehensive and in-depth understanding of the subject. Such research should prioritize aspects that are perceived as underrepresented, thereby addressing the identified knowledge gaps.

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