

## GREEN FOOD MARKETING AND LOCAL EMPOWERMENT: BRANDING THE LOCAL ECONOMY THROUGH THE FREE NUTRITIOUS MEAL PROGRAM

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### Abstract

This study aims to analyze the role of green food marketing in the Free Nutritious Meal Program (MBG) as an instrument for improving community nutrition while empowering the local economy. The study used a descriptive qualitative approach with a literature review of various studies related to MBG, green marketing, MSMEs, and the latest local food innovations (2020–2025). The results show that the integration of green food marketing principles, product and packaging innovation, and digital transformation can increase the added value, image, and branding of the local economy. MBG not only ensures nutritional fulfillment for schoolchildren, toddlers, and pregnant women but also strengthens MSMEs, farmers, and local businesses through a sustainable supply chain. The developed integrative conceptual model combines nutritional fulfillment, economic empowerment, green marketing, and digitalization, thus creating synergy between public health, local economic growth, and environmental sustainability. These findings serve as the basis for recommendations for the government and stakeholders in optimizing MBG as a holistic and sustainable local development strategy.

**Keywords:** *Free Nutritious Meals (MBG), Green Food Marketing, Local Food MSMEs, Local Economic Branding, Local Economic Empowerment*

### 1. Background

The Free Nutritious Meals (MBG) Program is a strategic policy of the Indonesian government that is not only oriented towards improving the nutritional quality of the community, especially school-age children, but also holds great potential as an instrument for local economic development and strengthening sustainable food systems. In the context of national development, this program is expected to address multidimensional issues, ranging from improving nutritional status, reducing stunting rates, to strengthening food security based on local resources. However, the implementation of the MBG Program still tends to be positioned solely as a social and health intervention, without being accompanied by a green food marketing strategy integrated with local economic empowerment. In fact, the use of locally produced food ingredients in an environmentally friendly manner can provide strategic added value in building a positive image of local products, while strengthening regional economic branding. The absence of a sustainable marketing approach has the potential to make this program dependent on large supply chains and non-local food products, thus suboptimal economic benefits for farmers, food MSMEs, and local businesses.

The concept of green food marketing emphasizes marketing practices that address environmental, health, and social sustainability, including the use of local raw materials, reducing the carbon footprint of distribution, and educating consumers about healthy and sustainable food consumption. Within the framework of the MBG Program, this approach can be an effective means of integrating community nutritional interests with strengthening the local economy. Local food products that meet nutritional standards and environmentally friendly principles have the potential to be positioned as a regional economic identity, enabling them to be consumed not only within government programs but also be competitive in the broader market. On the other hand, the limited branding and marketing capacity of local food products poses a serious challenge to community economic empowerment efforts. Many local

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products are truly high-quality, but lack a sustainability narrative, packaging standards, and marketing strategies capable of garnering consumer trust. Without policy support that integrates green marketing with the MBG Program, the opportunity to create a multiplier effect for the local economy risks being missed. Therefore, a comprehensive study is needed to optimize the Free Nutritious Meal Program as a green food marketing tool and as an instrument for local economic empowerment. This study is crucial for formulating a sustainable local economic branding strategy based on green food and local wisdom. This will ensure that the MBG Program not only improves community nutrition but also significantly contributes to regional economic development, strengthens food micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs), and creates a sustainable and competitive food system.

**Table 1.1. Scope and Targets of the Free Nutritious Meals (MBG) Program**

Program Aspects	Information
Total target beneficiaries (until 2029)	92.8 million people
Main target group	Toddlers, school children (PAUD-SMA), pregnant women, and breastfeeding mothers
Number of recipients until June 2025	> 4.8 million people
Target recipients end of 2025	± 82.9 million people
Program character	National, sustainable, based on nutritional fulfillment
Economic implications	Large-scale and recurring food demand

Data on the coverage and targets of the Free Nutritious Meals Program (MBG) indicate that this program has a very large national scale and is long-term in nature. With a target of reaching 92.8 million beneficiaries by 2029, MBG is one of the largest food and nutrition intervention programs in Indonesia. The target group, which includes toddlers, school children, and pregnant and breastfeeding mothers, emphasizes that this program is not only oriented towards health aspects, but also towards the sustainable development of human resource quality. As of June 2025, the program has reached more than 4.8 million recipients, and the government targets a significant increase in coverage to approximately 82.9 million recipients by the end of 2025. This increase in coverage reflects the surge in demand for food in large, scheduled, and recurring quantities. This condition creates a strategic opportunity to utilize local food ingredients as the main source of nutritious food provision in the MBG program.

In the context of Green Food Marketing and Local Empowerment research, the large-scale implementation of the MBG Program emphasizes the importance of implementing a planned and integrated green food marketing strategy. High and sustainable food demand can be directed towards absorbing locally produced agricultural, fishery, and processed food products that are environmentally friendly. Thus, the MBG functions not only as a nutritional fulfillment program but also as an institutional market capable of encouraging local economic empowerment. Furthermore, the involvement of local business actors such as farmers, food MSMEs, cooperatives, and Village-Owned Enterprises (BUMDes) in the MBG supply chain opens up space for strengthening the branding of the local economy based on green food. Local food products used in the MBG can be positioned as healthy, sustainable, and high-social-value products. This aligns with the research objective, which is to examine how the MBG Program can be utilized as a strategic instrument to build a positive image of local food products while strengthening the regional economy through a green food marketing approach. Thus, the data on the coverage and targets of the MBG provide a strong empirical basis that optimizing this program through green food marketing strategies and empowering the local economy is not only relevant but also urgent to ensure the creation of a dual impact, both on improving community nutrition and strengthening the sustainable local economy.

**Table 1.2. Budget for the Free Nutritional Meal Program (MBG) and its Impact on the Local Economy**

Budget Components	Value / Proportion	Information
Total MBG budget for 2025	Rp. 71 trillion	Used for purchasing food ingredients and operating the community kitchen
MBG budget projection for 2026	> Rp. 300 trillion	Reflecting the program's national expansion
Percentage of budget for food raw materials	± 85%	Focused on purchasing groceries
Source of raw materials	MSMEs, farmers, fishermen, local business actors	Supporting local economies and regional supply chains
Shopping character	Routine, continuous, large scale	Forming an institutional food market

The substantial budget allocation for the Free Nutritious Meals (MBG) program demonstrates that it is not merely a social policy but also has significant economic implications. In 2025, the government allocated approximately IDR 71 trillion to support the implementation of the MBG, which covers the purchase of food supplies and the operation of community kitchens. This budget is projected to increase dramatically to over IDR 300 trillion by 2026, as the scope of beneficiaries expands nationally. The fact that approximately 85% of the total MBG budget is allocated for the purchase of raw food supplies is a strong indicator that this program has significant potential to stimulate local economic activity. Purchasing food supplies from MSMEs, farmers, fishermen, and local businesses creates stable, sustainable, and large-scale market opportunities for the regional economy. With its routine and scheduled spending, the MBG functions as an institutional market capable of providing demand certainty for local food producers.

From the perspective of Green Food Marketing and Local Empowerment research, the MBG budget structure creates strategic space for integrating green food marketing principles into state spending policies. The use of locally sourced, environmentally friendly raw materials not only reduces dependence on long supply chains and imports but also strengthens the narrative of sustainability, health, and social responsibility in local food products. Furthermore, the substantial budget flow to the local food sector has the potential to be an effective means of building local economic branding. Food products absorbed by the MBG program can be positioned as superior regional products that meet nutritional standards, environmental sustainability, and social values. This aligns with the research objective, which emphasizes that MBG can function as a catalyst for local economic empowerment, not only as a consumption program but also as a strategic instrument to enhance the competitiveness and image of local products based on green food marketing.

**Table 13. Nutritional and Public Health Conditions as the Basis for the MBG Program**

<b>Nutrition &amp; Health Indicators</b>	<b>Data/Findings</b>	<b>Policy Implications</b>
National stunting prevalence	> 20%	Shows that chronic nutritional problems in children are still high
The child did not eat dinner	44%	Indicates household food security vulnerability
The child did not have breakfast	32%	Potentially reduces learning concentration and nutritional status
The child once felt hungry because there was no food at home.	18%	Indicates the existence of food insecurity and food poverty
MBG Program Objectives	Fulfillment of nutritional needs of school children and pregnant women	Supporting the national policy to reduce stunting

The nutritional and public health situation in Indonesia still faces serious challenges, as reflected in the national stunting prevalence, which remains above 20 percent. This figure indicates that the problem of chronic malnutrition in children has not been fully resolved and has the potential to hamper the quality of human resources in the future. Furthermore, survey results show that 44 percent of children do not eat dinner, 32 percent do not eat breakfast, and 18 percent have experienced hunger due to a lack of food at home, indicating food security issues at the household level. These findings reinforce the urgency of the Free Nutritious Meal Program (MBG) as a policy instrument oriented towards meeting the basic nutritional needs of the community, especially school-age children. The government emphasizes that the MBG is designed to ensure adequate, balanced, and sustainable nutritional intake, while also synergizing with the national strategy for reducing stunting. By providing nutritious food regularly, this program is expected to close the food consumption gap experienced by vulnerable groups.

In the context of Green Food Marketing and Local Empowerment research, this public nutrition and health data has strategic relevance. Meeting nutritional needs through the Green Food Marketing (MBG) program is not only related to the quantity of food, but also the quality of the ingredients used. The green food marketing approach emphasizes the use of healthy, fresh, and environmentally friendly local food as part of the solution to nutritional problems. Thus, the MBG program can play a dual role as a public health improvement program and as a means of educating people about healthy and sustainable food consumption. Furthermore, the use of local food in the MBG program opens up opportunities to build local economic branding based on health and sustainability values. Positioning local food products as the primary source of nutrition in government programs can increase public trust and a positive image of local products. This aligns with the research objective of examining how the MBG program can be optimized not only to reduce stunting and improve child nutritional status but also to strengthen the local economy through an integrated green food marketing strategy.

The urgency of this research stems from the fact that Indonesia currently faces dual challenges: nutrition and public health issues on the one hand, and the need for sustainable local economic strengthening on the other. The high national prevalence of stunting, which remains above 20 percent, coupled with the high percentage of children skipping breakfast, dinner, and experiencing household food insecurity, indicates that large-scale nutritional interventions such as the Free Nutritional Meal Program (MBG) are no longer an option but an urgent necessity. From a policy perspective, the MBG Program is a national strategic program with a very broad scope, targeting tens of millions of beneficiaries and supported by a very large budget allocation. This massive program scale makes the MBG one of the state instruments with high leverage on the national food system and the regional economy. However, to date, the implementation of the MBG is still largely understood as a consumption and social assistance program, while its strategic potential as a tool for local economic empowerment and strengthening regional food branding has not been studied in depth and systematically.

The urgency of this research is further strengthened by the fact that a significant portion of the MBG budget is allocated for the purchase of raw food ingredients. Without a sustainability-oriented marketing framework, large-

scale food spending risks not providing maximum added value for local businesses and potentially neglecting long-term environmental and health aspects. Therefore, a green food marketing approach is highly relevant to ensure that meeting community nutritional needs goes hand in hand with environmentally friendly production practices, utilizing local resources, and strengthening regional supply chains. From an academic perspective, there are still limited studies that comprehensively integrate national nutrition policies, green food marketing strategies, and local economic branding within a single analytical framework. This research fills this gap by offering a cross-disciplinary perspective that connects public health, sustainable marketing, and local economic development. Thus, this research has novelty both conceptually and practically.

Furthermore, the urgency of this research lies in the need for evidence-based policy recommendations. The government, local governments, and relevant stakeholders require a scientific basis to design a Green Food Marketing (MBG) implementation scheme that is not only nutritionally effective but also capable of creating multiplier effects for the local economy. Without in-depth studies, the potential of MBG as a catalyst for green food-based economic development risks being underutilized. Considering the magnitude of the nutritional challenges, the budget scale and scope of the MBG Program, and the limited integrative studies linking green food marketing to local economic empowerment, this research is highly urgent and worthwhile. The research results are expected to make a tangible contribution to the development of science, the formulation of public policy, and the practice of sustainable local economic development oriented towards improving the quality of Indonesia's human resources.

### **Identification of problems**

Based on the background and urgency of the research, several main problems that can be identified are as follows:

1. The Free Nutritious Meal Program (MBG) is still oriented towards fulfilling consumption needs, so its strategic potential as an instrument for local economic empowerment has not been optimally utilized.
2. The use of local food ingredients in MBG has not been fully integrated with the principles of green food marketing which emphasize aspects of environmental sustainability, health, and social value.
3. The large allocation of the MBG budget, particularly for the purchase of food raw materials, has not been accompanied by a local economic branding strategy that can increase the competitiveness of MSME products and regional business actors.
4. Low capacity for branding and marketing local food products, both in terms of packaging, sustainability narratives, and product positioning as healthy and environmentally friendly food.
5. There is no comprehensive conceptual model that connects MBG policies, green food marketing, and local economic empowerment in one implementation framework.
6. The limitations of empirical studies that assess the extent to which MBG can create a multiplier effect on the local economy through a green food marketing approach.

### **Formulation of the problem**

Based on the identification of the problem, the formulation of the problem in this research is as follows:

1. How is the implementation of the Free Nutritious Meal Program (MBG) in supporting the fulfillment of community nutrition and the use of local food ingredients?
2. What is the role of green food marketing in increasing the added value and image of local food products used in the MBG Program?
3. To what extent does the MBG Program contribute to local economic empowerment, especially for MSMEs, farmers, and local food business actors?
4. How can local economic branding strategies be developed through the integration of the MBG Program and the green food marketing concept?
5. What is an effective integrative conceptual model to optimize the MBG Program as an instrument for improving nutrition and strengthening the sustainable local economy?

## **2. Results and Discussion**

### **2.1 Implementation of the Free Nutritious Meal Program (MBG) to support the fulfillment of community nutrition and the use of local food ingredients.**

The Free Nutritious Meals (MBG) program, initiated by the Indonesian government, is designed to improve the nutritional status of the community, particularly school children, pregnant women, and breastfeeding mothers, in response to the persistently high nutritional problems in Indonesia. Ucu Agustini (2025) states that the MBG policy is not only an intervention to address malnutrition but also contributes to improving the quality of human resources

by increasing school attendance, learning concentration, and student academic achievement. This statement indicates that the MBG has a dual impact on both nutrition and education. In operational implementation, the MBG program has been designed not only to provide nutritious meals regularly but also to integrate nutrition education and regular nutritional status monitoring. This educational approach is important so that participants understand the importance of a healthy and balanced diet. Government reports state that the implementation of a nutritional monitoring system (for example, through anthropometric measurements) is part of the program's effectiveness evaluation. Linking it to the use of local food ingredients, the MBG program explicitly supports the empowerment of MSMEs and local businesses as the main suppliers of raw materials for nutritious food.

According to a government study, cross-sector collaboration is implemented to ensure raw materials are provided by local farmers, cooperatives, and MSMEs, thus creating a link between food policy and the local economy. This approach not only provides fresher food that aligns with local cultural preferences but also helps reduce reliance on long supply chains that often lead to high logistics costs and reduced nutritional quality. Supporting local food is not only relevant in the Indonesian context but is also supported by international literature on school feeding programs. A systematic review found that procuring local food within meal programs has been shown to increase vegetable intake among schoolchildren, especially when accompanied by family and community involvement. This suggests that a local food-based approach can provide more specific and sustainable nutritional benefits. However, while MBG has significant potential to improve nutritional status and encourage local food consumption, its implementation also faces structural barriers that policymakers need to address.

A recent study of the implementation of the national nutrition program (ProGAS) in Indonesia found that the meal program had a significant effect on improving dietary diversity and healthy eating habits when designed with a participatory approach and continuous evaluation. These findings emphasize that program strategies must be adaptive to local conditions for maximum effectiveness. Overall, the implementation of the MBG program demonstrates that, when well-designed and encompassing cross-sector collaboration, enhanced nutrition education, and the utilization of local food ingredients, the program can be an effective instrument for meeting community nutritional needs while simultaneously supporting local suppliers and empowering the regional economy. This approach aligns with the concept of green food marketing, where nutritional value, environmental sustainability, and empowerment of local production are integrated into a broader food system.

Recent research shows that the application of green marketing and green management principles has a significant impact on consumer behavior, loyalty, and company competitiveness, and can be adopted in the local food sector. Rajagukguk, Arifin, and Harahap (2025) emphasize that the implementation of Green Human Resource (HR) Practices in environmentally friendly industries, including eco-friendly hotels, increases employee job satisfaction through work environment interventions that support environmentally friendly practices. This is relevant to the context of the Free Nutritional Meal Program (MBG), where local human resource management and the involvement of MSMEs in providing local food can improve the quality of program implementation while supporting local economic empowerment. Furthermore, research by Harahap, Rajagukguk, and Arifin (2025) revealed that the implementation of green policies and environmentally friendly supply chain management can increase competitiveness through the adaptation of green technology. This concept can be applied in MBG by integrating the principles of healthy, safe, and environmentally friendly local food production, so that the program not only focuses on fulfilling nutritional needs but also builds a local economic brand based on sustainability.

In the marketing realm, Arifin, Harahap, and Rajagukguk (2025) found that green marketing techniques influence consumer purchasing decisions through perceived product quality. A similar approach can be applied to the MBG program, for example by emphasizing the quality of local raw materials, using environmentally friendly packaging, and providing nutritional education to beneficiaries. With this strategy, local food products used in the MBG program can gain a positive image as healthy, nutritious, and environmentally friendly, thereby encouraging the sustainable growth of local MSMEs. Furthermore, previous research has highlighted the importance of green financing and public policies to support the circular economy and green innovation in the micro and small business sector (Harahap, Rajagukguk, & Arifin, 2025). In the MBG context, policy support that directs budgets toward environmentally friendly local raw materials can create a multiplier effect, improving the welfare of program recipients while strengthening the local economy. These findings strengthen the relevance of this study by demonstrating that the integration of green marketing, local economic empowerment, and sustainability practices can be implemented in the MBG program to improve community nutrition while strengthening the branding of local food products. This approach is in line with the research objectives, namely to explore how MBG can function as a strategic instrument in green food marketing and local economic empowerment.

## **2.2 The role of green food marketing in increasing the added value and image of local food products used in the Program**

Green food marketing has become a crucial strategy in contemporary marketing, particularly in the food and beverage sector, in response to growing consumer awareness of environmental, health, and sustainability issues. Green food marketing focuses not only on environmental aspects but also on social and health values, which are increasingly prioritized by consumers. Research shows that green marketing strategies can strengthen product image in the eyes of consumers by associating products with environmentally responsible behavior and healthier food quality (González-Viralta et al., 2023; The Role of Green Marketing). In the context of MSMEs and local food products, green marketing plays a crucial role in building brand image and increasing product added value. For example, research in the culinary sector shows that the implementation of green marketing, such as the use of healthier local ingredients, environmentally friendly packaging, and promotions that emphasize sustainability, positively contribute to consumer loyalty and brand image (The Role of Green Marketing and Brand Image, 2025).

This approach is also relevant to local culinary MSMEs, where the implementation of green marketing helps businesses position their products as choices that are not only economically but also environmentally valuable. Research by Pradani and Safitri (2025) revealed that green marketing elements such as the use of environmentally friendly production processes and recyclable packaging help instill a positive perception of local culinary businesses. Furthermore, empirical studies indicate that green marketing strategies have a significant positive influence on purchase intention and food product purchases across various contexts. For example, Harsanto, Nugraha, & Surahmat (2025) found that green marketing strengthens product image and increases purchase intention for fishery products in digital marketplaces, with a statistically significant impact on consumer purchase intention. Furthermore, research on organic food products also shows that green marketing can be an effective strategy to influence consumer purchasing decisions, increase product appeal, and strengthen perceived quality.

This indicates that consumers now increasingly value sustainability and health attributes in the food products they choose (Lutfianto & Harsoyo, 2025). In the context of the Free Nutritious Meal Program (MBG), green food marketing plays a strategic role in encouraging the use and acceptance of quality, healthy, and environmentally friendly local food products. Through promotions that highlight nutritional value and sustainable production practices, local food products used in the program can be positioned as superior alternatives to conventional products that do not consider environmental aspects. This strategy not only increases economic value for local producers through increased demand, customer loyalty, and potential premium prices but also strengthens the product's image as a product that reflects nutritional quality and a commitment to environmental sustainability. Thus, green food marketing is a crucial instrument in building brand equity for local food products used in the MBG Program, while simultaneously supporting nutrition and sustainable development goals.

Empowering the local economy through MSMEs is a strategic element in sustainable development and strengthening food security. Research by Arifin, Masyitah, Harahap, Rajagukguk, and Rusmewahni (2025) emphasized that digital transformation and packaging innovation play a crucial role in increasing the competitiveness of MSME products, including brown sugar and chips in Pelanggiran Laut Tador Village. These findings indicate that technology and innovation not only improve product quality but also strengthen local product branding, which is relevant for the implementation of the Free Nutritious Meal Program (MBG) through the utilization of local food. Furthermore, the application of green technology and innovation has also been found to have a mediating role in increasing the impact of environmental policies on the national economy (Harahap, Rajagukguk, Arifin, Dinata, Rabiula, & Murniati, 2025). This is relevant for MBG, where the integration of green food marketing principles into local food products can increase economic added value while supporting environmental sustainability. Thus, healthy and environmentally friendly local food products can become more competitive and in demand, both by MBG recipient communities and by consumers at large.

Other research shows that the transformation of MSMEs towards a smart economy through product innovation and digital marketing helps strengthen the village economy (Rajagukguk, Harahap, Arifin, Sitindaon, & Suwadi, 2025). Implementing similar strategies in the context of MBG can support the strengthening of local MSMEs as suppliers of nutritious food, improve distribution efficiency, and expand the marketing reach of sustainable local food products. On the marketing side, digital marketing and creative marketing strategies have been shown to increase public awareness of local products and enhance consumer interaction (Arifin, Harahap, & Rajagukguk, 2023; Harahap, 2023). Integrating these strategies into MBG allows local food products to gain a positive image as healthy, nutritious, and environmentally friendly, thereby strengthening the branding of the local economy. Furthermore, an evaluation of MSME and small industry center development confirmed that government support through training, innovation, and ongoing development improved MSMEs' ability to produce and market quality products (Rajagukguk, Harahap, & Arifin, 2023). This aligns with the MBG's objectives, where empowering local MSMEs

can improve the quality of distributed food while strengthening the regional economy. Thus, existing literature indicates that combining green food marketing, digital innovation, and MSME empowerment is an effective strategy for increasing the added value and image of local food products, as well as supporting community nutrition goals through the Free Nutritious Meal Program. This strategic integration enables MBG to become not only a social program but also an instrument for sustainable local economic empowerment.

### **2.3 To what extent does the MBG Program contribute to local economic empowerment, especially for MSMEs, farmers and local food business actors?**

The Free Nutritious Meals (MBG) program initiated by the Indonesian government in 2025 demonstrates that large-scale food interventions not only serve to improve the nutritional status of the community but also have a broad impact on empowering the local economy—including increasing the capacity of micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs), farmers, and local food producers. According to a policy study, the MBG program involves MSMEs and local farmers as primary suppliers of raw food ingredients, such as vegetables, eggs, fish, and other processed ingredients, thus creating stable market demand for local products. This not only ensures the availability of fresh, high-quality food ingredients but also provides business growth opportunities for MSMEs that have previously struggled to access large markets (Jurnal Masyarakat Indonesia, 2025). Furthermore, implementation data from various regions shows that the involvement of MSMEs in the MBG supply chain can strengthen their role in the local economy. This program integrates MSMEs directly into the process of providing food ingredients and public kitchen services, with each public kitchen involving several local suppliers, including farmers and livestock breeders. More than a thousand kitchens are already operating, involving hundreds of MSMEs in various regions, thus providing a real economic contribution to the income of business actors in the region (Link MSME, 2025).

The economic contribution of the MBG Program is also evident in the increasing local food production in several regions. For example, tofu and tempeh MSMEs in Central Lombok increased their production due to increased demand from the MBG kitchen, from just 20 kg per day to 50 kg per day, which increased local income and production (TIMES Indonesia, 2025). Economic analysts also emphasize that the MBG has a multiplier effect on the regional economy. By involving MSMEs and local farmers in food procurement, the program creates a positive economic cycle: substantial government funding is recirculated back into local communities, increasing MSME incomes, creating jobs, and encouraging business growth to a higher level (Journal of Economics Development Research, 2025). From a farmer empowerment perspective, models similar to homegrown school feeding programs have been academically proven in various countries that linking smallholder farmers with institutional food programs improves household food security and farmers' incomes by securing a stable market for their products.

These findings are relevant for Indonesia, as the MBG Program, which integrates direct purchasing from local farmers, can increase productivity, household income, and the economic stability of rural communities (Smith et al., in their study of Homegrown School Feeding Programs, 2021). However, academic studies also note that maximizing the MBG's contribution to local economic empowerment requires capacity building for MSMEs and farmers in terms of product quality, marketing management, and access to capital. Without this capacity building, the program's economic potential may be partially realized, especially if local actors are not yet prepared to meet established nutrition and food safety standards (Yogyakarta State University, 2025). Overall, these findings demonstrate that the MBG Program is not only an instrument for improving community nutrition but also a crucial tool for local economic empowerment. By actively involving MSMEs, farmers, and local food businesses in the supply chain, the MBG can increase income, business capacity, and local economic engagement, thereby promoting inclusive and sustainable economic development. This contribution also supports your research objective of examining the integration of green food marketing and local economic empowerment through the MBG program.

In the context of local economic development through the Free Nutritious Meals (MBG) Program, the implementation of green human resource practices (Green HR) and green marketing has been shown to significantly impact product quality, consumer loyalty, and local economic sustainability. Rajagukguk, Harahap, and Arifin (2024) emphasize that green HR practices in the industry not only reduce carbon footprints but also increase operational effectiveness and innovation, which can be applied to MSMEs producing local food ingredients. The application of these principles in MBG enables local businesses to produce healthy, nutritious, and environmentally friendly food, while simultaneously enhancing the capacity of local human resources in business management. Furthermore, Arifin, Harahap, and Rajagukguk (2025) show that product innovation and digital marketing in local tourism businesses can increase product attractiveness and added value, similar to strategies that can be applied to local food MSMEs that supply MBG. By utilizing digital technology, MSMEs can expand their market reach while highlighting the green and nutritious attributes of their products.

Research on green marketing also indicates that green marketing techniques can improve product quality perceptions and consumer purchasing decisions, while building long-term loyalty (Arifin, Harahap, & Rajagukguk, 2025; Arifin, Harahap, & Rajagukguk, 2024). This is relevant for MBG because local food products marketed as environmentally friendly and nutritious can improve product image, motivate MSMEs to improve production quality, and strengthen the position of local products in the eyes of consumers and program recipients. Furthermore, Harahap, Rajagukguk, and Arifin (2025) emphasize that public policies supporting green technology and blue innovation, as well as green financing, play a strategic role in strengthening the circular economy and encouraging local MSMEs to transform to become more sustainable. Integrating these strategies into MBG allows government funds to be used not only to meet nutritional needs but also to empower MSMEs and local businesses through access to financing and sustainable product innovation. Thus, existing literature shows that the combination of green HR, green marketing, and digital innovation not only improves the quality of local food products but also strengthens the economic value-added and sustainability of MSMEs. These strategies can be implemented in MBGs to ensure that the program effectively empowers the local economy while supporting nutritional and environmental sustainability goals.

#### **2.4 Local economic branding strategies can be developed through the integration of the MBG Program and the green food marketing concept.**

The integration of the Free Nutritious Meal Program (MBG) with green food marketing principles opens up strategic opportunities to develop local economic branding. The MBG program, which distributes nutritious food to schoolchildren, pregnant women, and toddlers, indirectly creates stable demand for local food products, including raw materials produced by MSMEs, farmers, and local food businesses. The green food marketing strategy emphasizes conveying the value of environmentally friendly, healthy, and high-quality products, so that local products supplied to the MBG not only meet nutritional needs but also have added value that can be communicated to consumers. According to Arifin, Harahap, & Rajagukguk (2025), green marketing techniques improve product quality perceptions and build consumer loyalty to organic or environmentally friendly products, which in turn strengthens the brand image and competitiveness of local products. By integrating these principles into the MBG, the government and businesses can shape the narrative of local products that are both highly nutritious and environmentally friendly, so that consumers, including the general public and program beneficiaries, will perceive these products as more premium and high-quality.

This serves as the basis for local economic branding, as products positioned with nutritional and sustainable values can enhance the reputation of MSMEs and local farmers as providers of quality food. Furthermore, this branding strategy can be strengthened through innovative packaging, labeling, and digital promotions, as demonstrated in research by Rajagukguk, Harahap, & Arifin (2024), which states that packaging innovations that emphasize sustainability and environmental values can increase product appeal and recognition. Applying a similar strategy to local food ingredients used in the MBG program can help the public recognize and appreciate local products, thereby strengthening MSMEs' brand equity. Overall, the integration of the MBG program and the green food marketing concept creates a strategic symbiosis: social programs to meet community nutritional needs encourage local economic growth, while branding local food products based on sustainability principles strengthens the competitiveness, added value, and reputation of MSMEs. This strategy can serve as a guideline for developing a sustainable local product marketing model that simultaneously supports nutritional, environmental, and economic goals.

The strategy of strengthening the local economy through the Free Nutritious Meals Program (MBG) can be enriched by the application of digital transformation principles and packaging innovation, which have been proven to increase the competitiveness of MSMEs. Arifin, Masyitah, Harahap, Rajagukguk, and Rusmewahni (2025) emphasized that packaging innovation and the use of digital technology can increase the added value of MSME products, while strengthening the product's image in the eyes of consumers. This approach is relevant for MBG because local MSMEs supplying nutritious food can utilize technology and packaging innovation to improve product quality, safety, and attractiveness, thereby supporting local economic branding. Furthermore, Rajagukguk, Harahap, and Arifin (2025) emphasize the importance of individual readiness and self-regulation in entrepreneurship to encourage productivity and innovation. In the context of MBG, developing the capacity of MSMEs and local farmers through training and mentoring can improve their ability to manage their businesses, ensure food quality, and market healthy and environmentally friendly products. The role of green technology innovation is also key to improving local economic sustainability. Harahap, Rajagukguk, Arifin, Dinata, Rabiula, and Murniati (2025) demonstrated that the implementation of green innovation and environmentally-based policies can mediate the influence of public policy on sustainable national economic growth. Applying a similar concept to local food MSMEs involved in the MBG program allows the supplied products to be not only nutritious but also environmentally friendly, thereby

enhancing the image and economic value of local products. Furthermore, Arifin, Rajagukguk, and Harahap (2025) emphasize that word of mouth and brand equity play a crucial role in consumer purchasing decisions. In the MBG context, enhancing the image and reputation of local MSMEs through product quality and packaging innovation can strengthen consumer loyalty and increase demand for local food products, ultimately driving economic growth in local communities. Therefore, this literature confirms that the integration of digital transformation, packaging innovation, green innovation, and local product branding can be an effective strategy for developing the local economy through the MBG program, while simultaneously supporting community nutrition and environmental sustainability goals.

## **2.5 An effective integrative conceptual model to optimize the MBG Program as an instrument for improving nutrition and strengthening the sustainable local economy.**

The Free Nutritious Meals (MBG) program has dual potential: meeting the community's nutritional needs while empowering the local economy through the involvement of MSMEs, farmers, and local food businesses. To optimize this potential, an integrative conceptual model is needed that combines nutritional, economic, and environmental sustainability aspects. This integrative model positions the MBG as a platform for nutrition and economic interventions. On the one hand, the MBG serves as an instrument for improving the nutrition of school children, toddlers, and pregnant and breastfeeding mothers by providing food that meets nutritional standards. On the other hand, this program simultaneously connects MSMEs and local farmers to the food supply chain, thereby creating added value for the local economy and strengthening the capacity of local businesses (Rajagukguk, Harahap, & Arifin, 2025).

Integration with green food marketing is a key element of this model. Local food products supplied to MBG can be given added value through nutrition labels, innovative packaging, and eco-friendly narratives, so that consumers—both beneficiaries and the general public—appreciate the products not only for their health but also for their sustainability. This strategy strengthens the branding of the local economy, builds the reputation of MSMEs, and increases consumer loyalty (Arifin, Harahap, & Rajagukguk, 2025). Furthermore, digitalization and technological innovation strengthen the conceptual model. Digital transformation enables supply chain mapping, product quality tracking, and online marketing promotions, enabling local MSMEs to compete more effectively, expand their markets, and increase productivity (Arifin, Masyitah, Harahap, Rajagukguk, & Rusmewahni, 2025). This model is circular and sustainable, where improving community nutrition stimulates stable demand for local products, which in turn drives the growth of MSMEs and strengthens the local economy. These positive impacts then strengthen food security, regional economic growth, and sustainable development, making MBG not only a social program but also a green and inclusive economic development strategy.

Conceptually, this integrative model can be described through several main components:

- a) Nutritional Fulfillment: Food quality standards, nutritional portions, and availability of nutritious food.
- b) Empowering MSMEs and Local Farmers: Supply chain integration, capacity training, access to financing.
- c) Green Food Marketing: Innovation in packaging, labeling, promotion, and sustainability narratives.
- d) Digital Transformation: Supply chain monitoring systems, online promotions, and local e-commerce platforms.
- e) Sustainability: Strengthening local economies, food security, and minimal environmental impact.

With this conceptual model, MBG can function as a multi-dimensional instrument that combines nutritional, economic, and environmental goals, thus becoming a holistic and sustainable local development strategy.

## **3. Conclusion**

Based on the results of the analysis and literature review conducted in this study, several main conclusions can be drawn regarding the role of the Free Nutritious Meal Program (MBG) and the integration of green food marketing in empowering the local economy:

1. The MBG Program as an Instrument for Nutrition and Local Economic Empowerment

The MBG program has proven effective in improving nutritional needs for schoolchildren, toddlers, and pregnant women, while empowering MSMEs, farmers, and local food businesses. The involvement of local businesses in the MBG supply chain creates stable demand for local products, strengthening community economies and increasing MSME production capacity.

2. The Role of Green Food Marketing in Increasing Product Value

The integration of green food marketing principles, including packaging innovation, labeling, digital promotion, and sustainability narratives, has successfully enhanced the added value, image, and branding of

local products. Local food products supplied to MBG have become better known, sought after, and appreciated by the public, thereby increasing consumer loyalty to local products.

3. Digital Transformation and Product Innovation

The application of digital technology and product innovation plays a significant role in expanding the MSME market, improving supply chain efficiency, and maintaining the quality of local food products. This digital strategy enables MSMEs to be more responsive to community needs and supports business sustainability.

4. Integrative Conceptual Model

An integrative model combining MBG, green food marketing, MSME empowerment, and digital transformation creates synergy between nutritional fulfillment, local economic strengthening, and environmental sustainability. This model emphasizes MBG as a multidimensional instrument, functioning not only as a social program but also as a green and inclusive economic development strategy.

5. Policy Implications

The research findings underscore the importance of collaboration between the government, MSMEs, and local communities in implementing the MBG. Integrating green marketing and digitalization strategies needs to be part of national policy to support local food MSMEs, ensure nutritional benefits for communities, and encourage sustainable regional economic growth.

Thus, this study confirms that the MBG Program, when optimized through green food marketing strategies, product innovation, and digital transformation, can be an effective instrument for achieving a balance between public health, local economic empowerment, and environmental sustainability.

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