



IIMC-CRC-2018-08

*IIMC CASE RESEARCH CENTER (IIMCCRC)*

*BHUPESH MANOHARAN, RISHIKESAN PARTHIBAN, SHALINI AND KRISHANU RAKSHIT*

*MARCH 2019*

# FARMIZEN: ARCHITECTING A REAL WORLD

## FARMVILLE

### (PART A)

MAY 2018, BENGALURU, FARMIZEN FARM

*"The ultimate goal of farming is not the growing of crops, but the cultivation and perfection of human beings."*

– Masanobu Fukuoka

In May 2018, Shameek Chakravarty, the co-founder and CEO of Farmizen, took a stroll amidst the gentle breeze through one of his partnering farms, reminiscing about his journey thus far. As he noticed two kids working playfully on their farm under the careful watch of their parents and farmers, he realized that his dream of enabling an experiential consumption for his customers had come true in its entirety. However, Chakravarty was fully aware that Farmizen had to constantly reinvent itself, if it were to continuously motivate its customers to immerse themselves in the (vicarious) farming process. Chakravarty was lost in his thoughts; should he add ratings and other gamification elements in his app, that would certainly help keep his customers constantly engaged going forward, but, would it affect the harmony that exists in the system right now or affect his farmers adversely?

Farmizen, a company that deployed app-based services to enable its customers to manage a piece of land in the real world, just like how Farmville, an online game, allowed its users to manage their farm in the virtual world, began its operations in January 2017 in Bangalore, India.

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*This case was written by Bhupesh Manoharan, Rishikesan Parthiban, Shalini and Prof. Krishanu Rakshit of the Indian Institute of Management Calcutta. The case was prepared solely to provide material for class discussion. The authors do not intend to illustrate either effective or ineffective handling of a managerial situation.*

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The firm enacted a model in which a customer could rent a 600 square feet plot for 2,500/month (36.40\$) and vicariously farm crops of their choice via the app with the help of farmers who owned that land and performed the actual production of crops. In essence, Farmizen's focal objective was to disrupt the horticulture consumption practices of the city dwellers by transforming the usual commodity purchase into an experiential purchase.

During the first 20 months of operation, Farmizen was largely successful in engaging its customers online through its app and offline through the weekend workshops it conducted in its partner farms. However, Chakravarty knew that the initial enthusiasm shown by his customers could be short-lived and that there was a need for continuous innovation from his end to ensure that the customers continued to pay the premium for the (vicarious) experience provided by Farmizen. To this end, Chakravarty was contemplating on introducing gamification elements in his app that included a holistic farmer rating system, customer badging system, among other things.

Chakravarty knew that such gamification elements would provide the much-needed incentives to the farmers to better themselves daily, since there was no incentive in the current system for a farmer to stretch his/her limits. He also knew that in the longer run, the rating system would enable differential pricing and help customers choose plots of land instead of being assigned one. For the customers, the badging system would incentivize them to learn more about the farming process, move beyond vicarious engagement with the app and frequent the farms more to harvest their produce, work on the farms, etc. As a result, it could lead to customers appropriating greater value from the system and hence lead to better prices for the farmers.

However, Chakravarty was apprehensive about the possible negative consequences of the introduction of game-like elements. In the current system, since there was no competition between farmers, he knew that there little incentive for farmers to deviate from ZBNF farming practices. However, he feared that the introduction of ratings might lure farmers to add inorganic pesticides, fertilizers, etc., thus taking the system back to where it all began. He also felt that badging customers might create a competitive environment in which the customers might reduce or even stop interacting within the online community and hence eliminate the benefits of the same. He was clearly in a fix. He knew that he had to take a decision soon and slowly attempted to distract his mind by harvesting his own weekly produce.