

Balete Family Farm School

“Integrating Swine Production into its Various Agri-Enterprises”

In a quiet community in Balete, Batangas, you can find the Balete Family Farm School (BFFS), the only exclusive secondary school for girls among the six family farm schools in the Philippines.

Similar to a formation school, BFFS teaches students to value the importance of agriculture and other entrepreneurial activities in their daily lives and that of their families. School Directress Edna Siscar pointed out, “This is a project where we help students and farm families improve their livelihood, while at the same time, instilling in their minds that farming is a noble profession, *hindi mamaliitin ang sarili nila* (something that they should be proud of!).



The Balete Family Farm School

Emphasizing agriculture in its curricula, BFFS showcases different agribusinesses in its 2.2 hectares of land, donated by a philanthropic individual, Mrs. Isabel Katigbak. It has livelihood projects like vegetable gardens, tawilis sardines making, honey production and of course, the piggery farm.

Its partnership with the ATI-International Training Center on Pig Husbandry (ATI-ITCPH) started in 2003 during a financial crisis. The crisis, due to the termination of financial support from BFFS' mother organization in Manila brought out the best among the management and teachers of the school. “We really worked hard to survive that time, and even until now. We looked for ways to augment the budget for the operation of our school. That was the time when we thought of expanding the piggery project”, Ms. Siscar said. Luckily, they were able to look for a donor. Before donating the money, he visited the ATI-ITCPH Farm for an ocular inspection.

Convinced by what he saw, the generous donor gave the money for the establishment and initial operation of the swine farm. ATI-ITCPH through Mr. Tomas Buizon, Training Specialist of the said institution assisted the school in the preparation of the building plans and the installation of the tubular polyethylene digesters, popularly known as TPED. The farm is suitable for a four sow level operation.

"The piggery serves as a demonstration farm for the families and venue where the students can learn skills related to raising pigs. Of course, it also generates income which is a big help for the school's fund for operation", relates Ms. Siscar enthusiastically. And ATI-ITCPH also brings its visitors to the farm to showcase one of the Center's assisted projects in the area.

She continues, "At present, the farm is profitable and has cut school's costs on LPG by half due to the presence of biogas from pig manure. The biogas is being used for cooking. It has decreased our use of LPG tanks by half. Before we use around 5-6 tanks in a month".



Proper maintenance of the biogas digesters ensures the school of a steady supply of gas used for cooking foods for the students.

According to the hardworking School Directress, the success and profitability of the farm is also due to the commitment of its caretaker, Christian a graduate of the Dagatan Family Farm School (BFFS' sister school) who was able to attend a "hands-on" training at ATI-ITCPH. The caretaker is capable and dedicated to the school and the project. (Surely, an important factor for the success of any project!)

Of course, problems come along the way like health problems in piglets and the bad smell coming from the piggery. But, "we first try to solve the problems by ourselves. If we cannot solve it then we call ATI-ITCPH (Mang Tom) for help. We consult him every now and then", she said.

As of now, Ms. Siscar has already a plan for its expansion into a 10-sow level farm and the conversion of the TPED into concrete biogas digesters. The project gained profit so far and with good production results. "Aside from the income, I want to help the families and the community through a dispersal project by using

our own animals. I am going to ask ATI-ITCPH's help in training the parents on pig production," she shared optimistically.

Though survival depends on the employee's hard work and commitment, and "help from civic-spirited individuals", the Balete Family Farm School will continue to exist and help more farm families improve their income. "There are a lot of people willing to support a project like ours since they see that community members benefit from our programs", Ms. Siscar proudly concluded.

Indeed, institutions like BFFS has a long way to go because of its generous donors, hardworking and committed mentors, and a willing partner – the ATI-ITCPH!



Mr. Tomas Buizon is the technical expert who assists the school.