

“AGRIPRENEURS in the Making”

by Virgilio Jude “Jojo” M. Hipolito, alumnus, and former President, ITCPH Alumni Association, Inc.

Sometime in 1999, with an idle land in Cavite, my father decided to fence our property in order to avoid possible problems with illegal squatters. Since fencing the property would still make it unproductive, our family opted to put up a farm as a fall back business venture. Initially, the constructed farm was designed for a 20-sow level, side-by-side with a 10,000-broiler poultry production. With knowledge derived from short courses in pig production, we started with a fatteners operation.

Though we were equipped to operate the poultry, we finally decided to concentrate on swine raising instead. Eventually, the poultry houses were refitted as breeding, farrowing, and nursery sections of the piggery. From 20 sows, we maintained a 60-sow level with breeding to fattening operation, averaging 500+ heads per month as farm population.

Same time as we started, we attended a boar auction at ATI-ITCPH in 1999. While strolling the premises, I came across a calendar of activities for 2000. Starting with the Intensive Course in 2000, I continuously attended seminars at the Center until this day and almost completed all their courses.

ATI-ITCPH played a vital role in our operation since the center enhanced our potentials to become a productive and well-managed farm. Also, the center has always provided us with updated information that helped us set our goals and targets. During the seminar proper, there was always that urge and excitement of going back to the farm and teach the workers at the piggery to do the proper way, the ITCPH way. Doing the proper way best suited for the operation is the key for optimum results. It is also interesting to note that whenever you return to ATI-ITCPH, hospitality is overwhelming. From the administration people, teaching staff, and the rest of the personnel, there is always that feeling of being welcomed.

Growth is always our vision. Although, as much as we would like to increase our sow level in Cavite, we cannot compromise the health status of the farm and space is very limited. Since Cavite is fast becoming an industrial area and community developers are creeping in, we already anticipated that eventually, we would not be allowed to operate anymore. So, early on, we invested in Nueva Ecija for a bigger area and investment in agribusiness is an invitation.

Success in this venture, I believe, cannot be measured in specific parameters. I think that it is what others perceived you to be or it might be a state of mind. Venturing into this business or any business for that matter, involves lots of risks. People would say that starting a business is hard and once established, it would remain that way. True, it is hard to start a business but it is harder to maintain one.

There are lots of challenges everyday. You have to deal with health problems, outbreaks, mortalities, unproductive people, theft, incomprehensible law of supply and demand, increase in production inputs, so called "F1-11" breeders from breeder farms, natural calamities, and so on. But, all these challenges are part of the whole scenario where we must endure in order to become stronger and decide on matters wisely.

In swine production, if all production aspects were ideal and stable, I would say that the business is very lucrative. With detailed planning, right management, attainable goal settings, and aggressiveness in marketing your products, profits surely will be pouring in. Again, it boils down to minimizing costs and maximizing resources in order to attain an optimal net income margin.

Integration of all agribusiness possibilities is now our long-term goal in Nueva Ecija. The initial venture in piggery, backed up by the ITCPH learning, paved the way for us to tap the potentials in the agricultural sector. With continuous learning from seminars in other fields of agribusiness, development of our Nueva Ecija Farm is well on its way.

From a barren land, we are transforming the farm into a productive landscape. Already, come 2007, our mango orchard is scheduled for its first large scale commercial fruiting. We are now supplying the red lady papaya variety in big and small supermarkets. We are continuously producing vegetables on and off season, processing red eggs (*itlog na maalat*) from our duck layers, operating a small scale broiler production and plans are already set for us to enter into a larger broiler operation, joining the *palay* trade, tilapia culture, and of course, a bigger piggery business.

With optimism, enthusiasm, and God's grace, our family is ready to embrace the challenges of being new breed 'AGRIPRENUERS'.