

January to March 2019 | ISSN 2546-0315

ACCESS

The Official Publication of the Agricultural Training Institute

A young man with a friendly smile is the central focus of the cover. He is wearing a dark blue jacket, a grey cap, and a yellow backpack strap. He is in an orchard, surrounded by trees laden with ripe red apples. The background is bright and slightly blurred, suggesting a sunny day. The overall mood is positive and industrious.

*Young Filipino
Farm Leaders*

Their journey in the Land
of the Rising Sun

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This publication is quarterly published by the Department of Agriculture-Agricultural Training Institute (DA-ATI)
Elliptical Road, Diliman,
Quezon City, Philippines

Printed in the
Republic of the Philippines

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Young farmers to begin new journey after training in Japan

Marianne B. Antonio

DILIMAN, Quezon City—After his 11-month on-farm training through the Young Filipino Farm Leaders' Training Program in Japan (YFFLTPJ), John Paul Cabangal, from Region XII, is now ready to adopt a science-based method of farming which he learned from his Japanese farmer-mentor.

Cabangal, who leads the 2018 batch of the YFFLTPJ as president, spoke about this during the assessment and post-evaluation activity facilitated for them by the Agricultural Training Institute (ATI).

"Kung science-based po ang approach ng farming, mas maganda ang results," he elaborated. *"If the approach to farming is science-based, better results can be achieved."*

Cabangal and the rest of the 2018 batch of YFFLTPJ trainees returned to the country on February 23, 2019 after living with Japanese farmers

for almost a year to learn about the modern and innovative farming techniques that they utilize.

Steven Patarata, from the University of Southern Mindanao, also said that one of the best practices he learned in Japan is on land preparation in rice farming. According to him, the practice is necessary to soil conservation and is highly needed in the Philippines.

Moreover, Ildefonso Beltran, from Region X, stated that he considers his entire experience in the program as his best achievement in life so far. He said, *"Kung tatanungin ako, 100 percent na naging masaya ako sa nangyari sa buhay ko at ito (YFFLTPJ) po ang pinakamataas na achievement ko so far."* *"If you ask me, I am 100 percent happy with my experience and this is my highest achievement so far."*

The new graduates also gave pieces of advice to the 2019 batch during a

meet-and-greet session. Majority of them recommended that the present batch study Nihongo intensively so that they can communicate well with their host farmers.

ATI Director Alfredo Aton congratulated the returning trainees and expressed his continuous support as they apply their newly acquired knowledge in improving their respective farms.

"One of the thrusts of the Agriculture Secretary is to focus on the young farmers being trained in Japan and monitor their milestones," he furthered.

Other highlights of the week-long Assessment and Post-evaluation for YFFLTPJ Batch 2018 include the presentation of the performance evaluation output, a thanksgiving party, preparation of project proposals, and a commitment-signing. The young farmers are expected to implement their farm plans within the year.

The assessment and post-evaluation activity was held last February 23-March 1, 2019 at the ATI Training Hall in the ATI Central Office Compound. ★



John Paul Cabangal, YFFLTPJ Batch 2018 President, shares science-based technologies and best practices learned during his training in Japan.

Aton takes oath of office as new ATI director

Erika Z. Vizcarra

DILIMAN, Quezon City—The Department of Agriculture (DA) officially welcomes the new director of the Agricultural Training Institute (ATI), Alfredo Aton, as he takes the reigns and steers the bureau in expanding its services nationwide.

In a short ceremony at the DA head office, Agriculture Secretary Manny Piñol swore in Aton as the ATI's Director IV. ATI division chiefs and training center superintendents were present and showed their full support as they witnessed the oath-taking rites.

After the ceremony, Piñol sat down with Aton and the rest of the ATI delegation for a quick dialogue. As he recognized the Institute's achievements in the past few years, Piñol urged the group to reach out to more farmers and fishers by strengthening community outreach efforts.

He furthered that the ATI needs to intensify its information campaign on various farming technologies to offer farmers more options in increasing farm productivity.

The DA chief also instructed ATI officials to lead in the development of instructional materials on agriculture and fisheries and continue the promotion of new technologies, together with other agencies like the Bureau of Plant Industry, Bureau of Animal Industry, among others.

Aton's oath-taking ceremony was held on January 23, 2019 at the Office of the Agriculture Secretary in this city. ★



Agriculture Secretary Manny Piñol swears in Alfredo Aton as the new ATI director, as witnessed by other ATI officials.



ATI Director Alfredo Aton hands over a plaque of recognition to loyalty awardee Leonila Caiz, head of the Budget Office, for her 38 years of service in government.

ATI looks at sustained agri productivity in its 32nd year

Marianne B. Antonio

DILIMAN, Quezon City—The Agricultural Training Institute (ATI) vows to be in the forefront of agricultural productivity through harmonized and proactive extension services as it celebrates its 32nd founding anniversary this year.

In his message during the anniversary program, ATI Director Alfredo Aton thanked all the Institute's personnel for working productively and consistently meeting targets in response to the growing needs of farmers and fishers.

"I believe that the accomplishments of this Institute are the results of the combined efforts of all employees who have been working with excellence and passion," Aton remarked.

He, likewise, encouraged everyone to help each other in

upholding the Institute's humble beginnings and build on the lessons of the past.

Other highlights of the event include the recognition of 2018 Loyalty Awardees and the oath-taking of newly appointed and promoted employees of the ATI Central Office. An ecumenical service was also held prior to the program proper.

The 32nd anniversary celebration at the ATI Central Office was held last January 29. Meanwhile, the ATI's network of training centers also held simultaneous celebrations in their respective offices.

The ATI celebrated its 32nd founding anniversary with "Sustaining Vibrant Agricultural Productivity through Harmonized and Proactive Extension Services" as its overarching theme. ★



YFFLTPJ alumni Ernesto Perlas, Jr. (in green shirt) tours the Japanese visitors around their farm in Palayan City, Nueva Ecija.

YFFLTPJ alumni showcase farming practices to Japanese partners

Marianne B. Antonio

LUZON, Philippines—Former trainees of the Young Filipino Farm Leaders' Training Program in Japan (YFFLTPJ) took the opportunity to express their gratitude and showcase their farming practices to Japanese officials and farmers who helped them improve their skills.

This was during the monitoring visit of Japan Agricultural Exchange Council (JAEC) officials, together with Japanese farmers who serve as host families to YFFLTPJ trainees.

The YFFLTPJ offers young Filipino farmers an 11-month on-farm training with Japanese farmers. This is aimed at enhancing the young farmers' leadership potentials through the exchange of knowledge on farming techniques and practices.

The group, led by JAEC Director for Operations Toshihiro Shimizu, expressed how pleased they are with the former trainees' adoption of Japanese technologies in their respective farms.

The farms of Alexander Paulo in San Antonio, Zambales; Ronald Echon in Candelaria, Zambales; and Ernesto Perlas, Jr. in Palayan City, Nueva Ecija were among the sites visited.

"We are happy to see the former trainees doing well in their farms and applying the techniques they learned in Japan," Shimizu said.

The group also visited an ATI Learning Site, Lukong Valley Farm in Dolores, Quezon, where they convened with the selected YFFLTPJ alumni.

Prior to the farm visitation, the JAEC officials met with Department of Agriculture (DA) Undersecretary for High Value Crops and Rural Credit Evelyn Laviña and ATI Director Alfredo Aton. Laviña expressed her support to the exchange program and assured that the DA will continue to undertake fruitful partnerships with key agricultural organizations worldwide.

Aton, on the other hand, thanked JAEC for their efforts in the implementation of the YFFLTPJ. He looked forward to how the program will further expand opportunities for young Filipino farmers.

The monitoring visit, which resulted from the JAEC-ATI meeting last year, was held on January 20-26, 2019 in Regions III and IV-A. ★

Aton to ATI staff, extensionists: Strengthen partnerships and build linkages

Ashlee P. Canilang

DILIMAN, Quezon City—Director Alfredo Aton challenged the staff of Agricultural Training Institute (ATI) to strengthen partnerships and build linkages to address challenges that confront the food and agriculture extension services.

During the FY 2018 Annual Performance Review and FY 2019 Commitment Signing held at ATI's central office, the current director of the Institute recognized the efforts and accomplishments in the previous year. However, he emphasized that there is a need to work closely with other organizations that have extension mandates.

"Farmers get very little guidance from agricultural extension workers because local government units have inadequate expertise in agriculture. They need extension so they can learn to produce more and increase their income," Aton said.

To bridge the gap between agriculture extension and the farmers, Aton said that ATI must have active involvement and cooperation on key programs as part of its strategic policies. These programs are: National Development Sorghum Program, a capacity-building program for indigenous people (IP) and farmers; the Global Environmental Policy 6 Project, a six-year development project on sustainable land management with ATI as the lead in the training of trainers; and, the Special Area for Agricultural Development, another capacity-building effort for the IP under the Kabuhayan at Kaunlaran ng Kababayang Katutubo program.

He also emphasized ATI's role on the implementation of the Rice Tariffication Law which opens up our country's rice market to ASEAN and other countries that export rice.

"We need to set boundaries and identify roles with our partner agencies through strategic planning," Aton explained.

Aton also highlighted the need to build strategic alliances with public and private partner agencies like the Department of Tourism, Department of Trade and Industry, Technical Education and Skills Development Authority, and Commission on Higher Education which all establish and promote farm tourism; the Department of Education for the Batang Filipino Farmers program; and other agencies that offer after-training support like the Go Negosyo and Mentor Me programs for the

promotion of farm business outlets.

"We also need to harmonize and intensify our extension programs among other agencies with focus on rural credit," Aton added.

During the event, Aton also stressed the need to strengthen ATI's corporate image through social media and to innovate online and offline agri-extension services to reach more clients and beneficiaries.

The FY 2018 Performance Review and FY 2019 Commitment Signing was held on January 23-24, 2019. This annual event is conducted to review the Institute's operational accomplishments, document best management practices, and set institutional policy directions for the succeeding year. ★



Director Alfredo Aton shares the policy directions for ATI for 2019.



The attendees take part in a question-and-answer session with Duran Farm Agribusiness and Training Center consultant Luis Bausa.

2019 free seminar series kicks off with 'Organic Farming for Newbies'

Larry Illich N. Souribio

DILIMAN, Quezon City—The 2019 free seminar series of the Agricultural Training Institute (ATI) is off to a good start as 370 individuals came for the first topic, Organic Farming for Newbies.

The participants were welcomed by Milagros Urbano, chief of the ATI Policy and Planning Division. She talked about the benefits of organic agriculture which, she said, is mostly "going back to the basics" of farming.

"Going organic is a long and tedious process. You need to be persistent, patient, and optimistic," she stressed.

Luis Bausa, a certified assessor and consultant to Duran Farm Agribusiness and Training Center, served as the resource person. He emphasized that organic farming should be a lifestyle for everyone to ensure good health for the family and environmental protection.

"In our households, we need to

practice organic farming as a family," he urged.

Aside from the lecture, Bausa led demonstrations on the preparation of organic fertilizers. Participants were also given information materials.

Organic vegetable seedlings from the Duran Farm were also put on sale to help the participants start their own urban agriculture gardens. "I am a retiree and I want to engage in a new venture. I wanted to learn about farming so I came here," Gina Porter, one of the participants, shared after the seminar.

The free seminar series of the ATI started in 2016 to provide the public learning opportunities about farming. Since then, thousands have attended the seminars which discussed different topics on agriculture and fisheries.

The first seminar for this year was held on January 18 at the ATI Rural Development and Education Center in this city. ★

'Gastronomica' book cover revealed

Vic Thor A. Palarca

EL SALVADOR, Misamis Oriental—The year 2016 saw the production and publication of a collection of success stories of the partner farmers and Learning Sites (LS) of the Agricultural Training Institute-Regional Training Center (ATI-RTC) X. When the first maiden issue of "Bahandi (The Sunrise Edition)" was out and in circulation, it was well-received and was then followed by book two, "Bahandi (The Northwind Edition)".

The intention was clear, the coffee table book of success stories is meant to showcase and highlight the success of the farmers, present failures as is, and at the same time leave readers with profound life lessons and truths such as the value of hard work, tenacity, fortitude, and the enduring and universal appeal of the family.

This year, ATI-RTC X takes another challenge in creating and producing corporate communication and information materials with another book entitled "Gastronomica".

"Gastronomica" is a celebration of good food, delicacies, and LS products from Region X. This time around, this new coffee table book will showcase its farmer partners, not only for their success, but also the food they produce which makes our meals and our eating experience all the more enjoyable.

The foodie project is equal parts a cookbook, a collection of food writing, and a catalog of farm products and processed goods showcasing appetite-inducing, highly nutritious, and palatable organic food fare prepared and carefully processed by LS partners, while highlighting the local delicacies they are known for. ★

Dream, Believe, Succeed

AN ACHIEVER'S STORY

Olivia D. Gatus

Paul Jhone Dominic Ebon has always dreamt of putting up his own restaurant someday. An out-of-school-youth, Paul thought he was aiming for the impossible. But his journey to success proves that dreams do come true even for people like him. A son of farmers Alvin and Vidala Ebon, Paul grew up in the family's 1.5-hectare lot in Calinan, Baguio District, Davao City. Their property produces assorted vegetables and fruit trees. As the eldest son, he sought for ways to turn his dream into reality. So, when he was invited by the Davao City Agriculture Office to join the 4-H Club, he was more than excited. He was fascinated because he knew that this would open great opportunities for him in agriculture.

True enough, Paul was able to participate in various capacity-building training programs conducted by the Agricultural Training Institute (ATI). "The ATI helped a lot in boosting my self-confidence and they encouraged me to do more. I started to like agriculture. It has become exciting and fulfilling for me. I applied the different agricultural technologies I learned to our farm and it helped boost our family's income," he related.

Not long after he joined the organization, he was elected as president of the 4-H Eagle Squad Club in their district. Despite the challenges of handling teenagers, he continued to recruit and organize the out-of-school youth in his barangay.





“I was actively participating in training programs and applied my knowledge in our farm to showcase my learning. It was then that the Department of Agriculture (DA) and the ATI noticed my hard work and I was lucky that my project proposal on native chicken production for our 4-H Club was approved,” said Paul.

The ATI granted the 4-H Eagle Squad Club PhP100,000 worth of funding assistance for their poultry production livelihood project. The amount is payable in three years from the date granted. Because of this, the club members were able to put up a poultry farm on the Ebons’ property, where they raise native chickens for marketing. This livelihood project also gives employment opportunities to 4-H members while they take turns in managing the poultry venture.

In 2015, Paul passed the exams for the Young Filipino Farmers’ Training Program in Japan (YFFTPJ). It is an exchange program with the Ministry of Japan where qualified young farmers are sent to Japan for 11 months to learn agricultural production techniques, management, and distribution systems. Upon returning, they are expected to impart the new knowledge, skills, and lessons they learned in their respective communities.

After the program, Paul proposed a meat processing project as value-adding for their existing backyard piggery business. He received PhP50,000 worth of post-training assistance as start-up capital to apply the technologies he learned in Japan. The money was used to purchase meat processing equipment and materials to start his business. He utilized their pig fatteners to produce tocino, embutido, chorizo, and

other meat products, which he sells to his neighbors and friends. He also sells fresh pork and lechon.

Aside from this, Paul also developed his personality and leadership skills. He was invited by the ATI to become a “senpai” or big brother who teaches basic Nihongo to other YFFTPJ trainees. He became a host brother for a local exchange program where young farmers from other localities stayed in his farm for one week to learn various agricultural technologies. Additionally, he was invited as resource speaker on different topics in agricultural technology and leadership skills. “I was able to transfer the knowledge I acquired in Japan,” Paul added.

“Though I was not able to finish my course on BS Hotel and Restaurant Management, I am happy that my meat processing business now is still in line with my childhood dream. My dream of owning a restaurant is within reach. I know in the end this will lead me to where I really want to be and what I really want to do,” Paul happily confided.

“This is all because I didn’t give up dreaming. I did not give up despite the setbacks. I worked for my dreams, always armed with positivity and enthusiasm, which helped me walk through all hurdles that came my way. Above all, I am a happy person, believing God knows what’s in my heart and He will guide me all the way,” Paul ended.

Paul is worthy of emulation—someone the youth should look up to. Once an out-of-school-youth, he didn’t let go of his dream and instead worked hard to achieve it. His success is validation that dreams come true when you commit yourself to achieving them.



THE BOY WHO SHARED HIS LOAVES AND FISH IN AGRICULTURE

Iseult Kyllie T. Capacio

“Nahirapan man kami noong exams mula pa sa region, ngayon naman ay nandito na kami sa inyong harapan, naka-suit na at papunta na po kami ng Japan,” Janbert Aranza, batch president of the 2016 Young Filipino Farmers’ Training Program in Japan or YFFTPJ (now the Young Filipino Farmer Leaders’ Training Program in Japan or YFFLTPJ), said as he gave an impression at the culmination activity of their 75-day Pre-Departure Orientation Course (PDOC).

In Aranza’s speech, he wholeheartedly thanked everyone who made the opportunity accessible to him, thanking the Lord for the blessings he’s received.

Throughout his speech, I could not help but hear the person beside me remark, *“Parang ako lang.”* The statement aroused my curiosity. Turning to him, he sheepishly smiled. I extended my hands to shake his, introduced myself, and asked questions. He obliged.



HUMBLE BEGINNINGS

Alexander Paulo grew up in the field. His father owned half a hectare of farm, but, apart from this, his old man was entrusted to oversee almost five hectares of land. Planting, tending to animals, harvesting—this was the life he got used to as a young lad.

The fourth in nine children, little Alexander served his family by helping in the farm and accompanying his mother sell the harvested goods. *“Halos kilala na ako ng mga tao sa amin dahil kasa-kasama ko ang nanay ko sa paglalako ng gulay,”* he said.

His charisma and servitude earned him a position in the Sangguniang Kabataan in San Antonio, Zambales while he was in high school. However, as he went to college, the overwhelming responsibilities in school, the farm, and local politics made him stop after freshman year.

All was going well for the family even after Alexander gave up school. Until 2006, when the head of their household fell ill. With this, he had to take over the supervision of the farm. The need to continuously fund his father’s medication made Alexander work

harder than ever. In 2007, he worked as barangay kagawad to try to make ends meet. It was a slow recovery for his father.

Years passed, 2010 came along with the chance for a new beginning—the YFFTPJ was offered him.

ECHOES OF THE PAST

Alexander underwent the PDOC where he, together with other selected young farmers, learned conversational Nihongo, and visited farms and agricultural institutions to learn about farming technologies. Even in the PDOC, his leadership was displayed. Whenever he can, he tried to assist his co-farmers with whatever questions they had. This prompted the group to elect him as the batch president.


Seeing Janbert onstage led Alexander to reminisce about when it was his turn to speak in front. As the president of batch 2010, Alexander felt the pressure to maintain a good reputation not just for himself but their batch as a whole.

FEET ON THE GROUND

Eleven months in Japan seemed to rush by, but not without a fight. When the group flew out of the country, Alexander’s mother had to sell what investment they had in the farm to fund household expenses, most especially his sibling’s school fees. But instead of putting all his energy to worrying, Alexander treated this as motivation.

“Noong ako ay nasa Japan, pinag-igihan ko. Nag-ipon ako ng pera,” he said, noting that he could not have saved money without his Japanese host family’s help. He put the money to good use when he came back home by having their house fixed and their farm developed.

After a considerable amount of time, the land that Alexander owned expanded. It was time to get back what the family had. From owning just



half a hectare, he now owns almost three. He acquired various livestock and a fish pond. He used some of the applicable technologies he learned from Japan, and is slowly transitioning to organic farming.

Apart from his savings, Alexander was also entrusted a large amount of money by his Japanese host farmer who came to visit his farm. Alexander shared this to help other YFFTPJ colleagues and the rest he used to cultivate his farm.

The time of mourning has passed, “My father is alive and well. My siblings have graduated—one became a professional teacher and another heads a local branch of a big courier service company. There is only one left studying.” Though he stopped schooling, Alexander now takes courses in agriculture.

Even being far from where he was, Alexander never forgot to be grateful to the people who helped him. He partakes in value-adding activities in the agricultural sector. One of which is hosting YFFTPJ trainees for their home-stay module. He also shares his technology to curious individuals who happen to pass by his farm—other farmers, neighbors, and even children. “*Ibinigay ito sa akin para rin ito ay maibigay ko sa iba,*” he said.

SHARING THE PASSION

“Kaya lang dumami yung pagkain na limang tinapay at dalawang isda dahil may isang bata na nag-share. Dahil may isang bata na willing mag-share kung anong mayroon siya.” He recalled the story of the little boy who, through sharing what he had, helped feed thousands.

This is echoed by Alexander’s life—he pressed on, cultivated the knowledge that he had, and is now sharing what little loaf and fish he has so others could have a taste of it and, in turn, prod them to pass it on.

He is Alexander Paulo: the boy who shared his loaves and fish in agriculture.

Senior citizen farmers, 4-H millennials stay connected through Smart ‘Millenniors’ Program

Angelica Marie T. Umali

MAGDALENA, Laguna—Tech-savvy millennials and senior citizen farmers bonded over smartphones and the Internet for a two-day mentoring program advocating #InternetForAll.

This is through the partnership between the Agricultural Training Institute and Smart Communications to make sure that senior citizens, particularly farmers, do not get left behind with today’s fast-paced advancements in technology. Through the Farmers’ Information and Technology Services Center in Magdalena, Laguna and Smart’s Public Affairs Group, the first leg of the Smart Millennials Program for Farmers was launched.

Around 30 senior citizen farmers, elders, and 4-H Club members from Magdalena convened to strengthen senior-millennial relationship through a shared use of technology.

The Smart Public Affairs team led the lecture, while 4-H club members, who are also agriculture students from Laguna State Polytechnic University (LSPU) Magdalena Satellite

Campus, volunteered to guide them on navigating their smartphones.

Volunteer Jimuel Patron shared, “I enjoyed spending time with our seniors despite the age gap. I was hesitant at first because my patience will definitely be tested but I’m happy that I volunteered and shared my knowledge.”

Specifically, the seniors learned about the parts and button functions of a smartphone, basics of Smart Long-Term Evolution or LTE, signing up for Facebook and Facebook Messenger, finding and streaming videos on YouTube, staying safe online, as well as the dos and don’ts in social media.

“Being able to learn all these is a big help. With it, I can now use the cellphone that my daughter gave me. Before, I only use it for calling—not even texting—but now, I can explore the Internet. There’s a lot to familiarize with, but I am thankful that I am learning little by little. I can talk to my relatives from distant places and see them through video call. I am having so much fun!” Rice Farmer Danilo

Lapore, 62, said.

“I can now also get updates from the Department of Agriculture, through their Facebook page, on various farming information and tips,” he added.

The program likewise serves as an avenue for millennials to give back. Regelyn Aliparo, another 4-H Club member and LSPU student, called it a coincidence that she was able to return the favor to her gradeschool principal, “Never did I expect this opportunity to happen—I am now the teacher and she is my student. It was fulfilling to share what you know to someone you look up to.”

The Smart Millennials Program was launched in 2017 and has already conducted sessions with senior citizens around Metro Manila, Cebu, and Cagayan de Oro. However, this session in Magdalena was the first specifically conducted for senior citizen farmers. It was held last January 31-February 1, 2019 at the Farmers’ Training Center in this municipality. ★



Rice farmer Danilo Lapore takes down notes while two 4-H Club members from Magdalena, Laguna guide him through the learning modules on smartphone, mobile data, and social media.

Media rally for organic agriculture

Ashlee P. Canilang

CALABARZON, Luzon—About 15 government and private media personnel based in Metro Manila visited successful organic farms in the region to learn about the basics of organic farming, March 25-27.

Agricultural Training Institute's (ATI) Information Services Division and Regional Training Center (RTC) IV-A organized "Converge: First Media Promotion for Organic Agriculture" to enlighten the media about the efforts of the Department of Agriculture (DA) and ATI on organic agriculture.

"As information agents, we recognize your role in dissemination and knowledge sharing in order to improve our agriculture sector," said Marites Piamonte-Cosico, center director of ATI RTC IV-A, in her welcome remarks.

During the event, the participants visited three successful organic farms: Luntiung Republika EcoFarms in Cavite, Chad's Nature Farms in Batangas, and Ato Belen's Farm in Laguna. These farms are ATI's accredited Learning Site for Agriculture, School for Practical Agriculture, and Extension Services Provider, respectively. These are model farms that practice and showcase applicable farm technologies and strategies.

Aside from the tours, the farm owners were also given the chance to share their insights and knowledge about organic farming to the media through a series of interviews.

Following the signing of Organic Agriculture Act of 2010 or the Republic Act 10068, the DA is stepping up its support to organic

farmers to address the growing demand for safe and healthier foods. 'Converge' is conceptualized to support this initiative.

According to Petrick Franco, film maker and freelance media professional, the event stirred more ideas for other related activities or gatherings.

"The event was very insightful and we gathered various concepts that can be translated into different mediums," Franco said. ★

The media practitioners listen to Aida Briones, owner of Chad's Nature Farms, as she explains how vermicomposting works.



ATI Central Luzon grants agri-starter kits to IP in Angeles City

Shanemie Carelle O. Daquio

ANGELES CITY, Pampanga—The Agricultural Training Institute (ATI) in Central Luzon granted agri-starter kits to 20 indigenous people (IP) and farmer-beneficiaries of the program “Responsableng Katutubo at Kabataan Tungo sa Maunlad na Pamayanan” (RKKTMP) on February 6, 2019 at Sitio Target, Brgy. Sapang Bato, Angeles City.

The starter kit is composed of hand tools, assorted vegetable seeds, organic fertilizer, molasses, drum containers, and goat.

“Una sa lahat po ay maraming salamat sa Panginoon dahil sinagot na ang matagal na po naming pinagdarasal na sana mapansin ang lugar namin at mabigyan ng mga ayuda. Pangalawa, salamat sa ATI dahil kayo po ang ginamit ng Panginoon sa aming mga panalangin. Hindi ninyo po kami pinabayaan at sana po ay tuloy-tuloy pa din po ang inyong supporta sa aming mga katutubo. Pangatlo po, makakaasa po kayo na pagyayamanin po namin itong mga pinamigay niyo sa amin at magbubunga po ang lahat ng pa training na ibinigay niyo po sa amin,” expressed Ptr. Narcito C. David, President of Sitio Target Farmers Association.

[“First of all, we thank the Lord for answering what we’ve been praying for in a long time which is for our community to be recognized and assisted. Secondly, we thank the ATI for being the Lord’s instrument in making our prayers come true. You did not abandon us and we hope that you will continue to support ethnic groups like us. Thirdly, we assure you that we will make the



most out of the materials you gave us and that the training you provided will bear fruit.”]

The starter kit distribution is part of the after-training support program for IPs to help them apply the knowledge and skills learned during the training on organizational strengthening, organic vegetable production, goat production held on September 4-6, 2018.

“Malaki ang aming paniniwala na lahat ng inyong natutunan sa mga pagsasanay noong nakaraang taon ay inyong palaguin. Kami po sa ATI ay pilit na ipinapaabot ang aming serbisyo sa inyo upang lahat po tayo ay aasenso,” said ATI Regional Training Center III director Veronica Concepcion Esguerra.

[“We truly believe that you will be able to nurture the knowledge you gained from the training last year. We, at the

ATI, strive to extend our services to you to help all of you prosper.”] The RKKTMP aims to raise the level of awareness and consciousness of 4-H Club members to the tradition and culture of IP community for better involvement and services to the community.

The program is divided into three phases and was launched on August 15-17, 2018. The first phase focused on training the 10 selected 4-H Club members on cultural sensitivity, participatory rural appraisal, and leadership skills.

The program was made possible in collaboration with the City Agriculture Office of Angeles headed by city agriculturist Ericson Dagdag; Tarlac Agricultural University (TAU) in Camiling, Tarlac; and Cynthia Tizon, owner of Charisma Nature Farm in Magalang, Pampanga. ★

A Tasteful Experience

Ronald F. Echon

Twenty years ago, my father welcomed an old lady carrying a Bible and a few magazines to our house. She invited us for a short study about some Bible verses. Before she left, she handed me a magazine titled “Gumising!” I found the magazine really interesting, especially the last part which featured cultures of different countries around the world. This was two decades ago, but the memory of the featured content is still vivid. It was about a food made from soy beans called “Natto”. The magazine mentioned how the beans are fermented inside rice straws and that it’s loaded with protein and good bacteria. I looked at my mother and said, “I want to eat this!” She replied, “You can, if you go to Japan.”

Years later, my aunt told me that our local government was looking for young farmers willing to be trained in Japan. I immediately showed my interest. I took the exams and passed it, ranking second. Honestly, I was dismayed because only the top passer would get the chance for the regional exams. The year passed and I forgot about it. In the following year, our provincial coordinator texted me and asked if I was still interested to take another exam. I took it without hesitation and, luckily, got the top spot this time. I also got the spot in the regional and national levels.

I would say that the experience is truly an opportunity and a blessing. I had a very kind host family who treated me like I was one of them. They had approximately eight hectares of rice, soy beans, and vegetables grown in a greenhouse. Everyday - especially during spring and summer - our day would start really early. At 3:00 AM, the

sun was already rising and would set around 8:00 PM. Hence, our working hours in those seasons were longer. Everybody worked while there was still light to take advantage of the time before the weather gets colder and the day becomes shorter. I admit that it was a bit exhausting, but some tasks became easier with use of modern machinery. I will never forget polishing hundreds of sacks of rice ALONE and piling them up into mountains of stacks during harvest season. In the morning, I would know if there will be a load of work ahead of me when my host father fills my bowl with rice and vegetables. He would smile at me as if he was telling me, “Eat a lot, we’re going to rock the farm.” I would fill his glass with fresh milk in response. This was what our relationship was like from the beginning.

With the lessons my batch mates and I took from our pre-departure program, I knew that I would be going to a ‘battle’ because of the new culture. But I was more than ready and willing.

Every night after work, I would take an hour by myself to study the language. I never missed a night without learning one new Japanese word. After an hour, my Otosan (host father) would knock on my door and invite me to grab a few cans of beer while watching TV. There were also festivals around town which happened at least once every week! For 11 months, my training was full of work, travel, and learning from the Japanese people. I will never forget how they value time like money, how they give importance to greeting everyone at any time of the day, and how they treat the little things just as important as the big ones. I don’t remember anyone who didn’t abide by the law, from the simple traffic rules to waste segregation in the household.

I took home with me the hope of having a country that has similar values. I dreamt of our country having high regard for farmers and of youths with interest to take over their fathers’ farm. More importantly, I became more into farming. I am now taking up Bachelor of Science in Agriculture at President Ramon Magsaysay State University. I also became the provincial 4-H Club president for Zambales and, eventually, the regional federation president for Central Luzon.

I know that when I came back from Japan, I took home with me not only the fulfilled dream of tasting Natto, but also a taste of what a country’s agriculture sector can be. I hope that I can help young people around me and inspire them to become more inclined in agriculture.

EDITOR’S NOTE:

Ronald, 30, is from Candelaria, Zambales. He is part of the 2015 batch of trainees for the Young Filipino Farm Leaders’ Training Program in Japan.



YOUNG FILIPINO FARM LEADERS' TRAINING PROGRAM IN JAPAN

Qualification requirements

01

Young Filipino farmer who is an out of school youth
High school graduate or college level (undergraduate)

07

Of good community standing and has no overdue obligations with the ATI at the time of application

02

Male or Female, Single, 20-27 years old

08

A good communicator, and can speak and understand English

03

Not employed at the time of application

09

Proof that has no physical deformities, tattoo, or piercing in any part of the body

04

Must have at least three years of farming experience at the time of application

10

With valid Philippine passport for at least five or 10 years or at least with proof of application to be presented during the national exam

05

Member of 4-H Club in the Philippines for at least one year

11

No previous travel to Japan

06

Has an available farm of at least 0.1 ha and/or with existing and owned agri-based projects such as crops, livestock, swine, poultry, and fisheries

12

Willing to learn Nihongo and new technologies

For more details, you may contact the ATI Partnerships and Accreditation Division at 929 8541 local 225.