

ACCESS

The Official Publication of the Agricultural Training Institute

FARMER- ENTREPRENEUR WITH A HEART

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Learning about Organic Agriculture at GerNil's Farm



ACCESS

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Native animal farming introduced to wounded soldiers for additional source of livelihood

Janine L. Cailo



Wounded-in-Action soldiers take part in a hands-on activity on preparing processed native swine by-products

NASUGBU, Batangas—With the aim to capacitate Wounded-in-Action soldiers and their dependents with skills and knowledge on the viability of native animal farming as an enterprise, the Agricultural Training Institute Regional Training Center (ATI-RTC) IV-A and the Department of National Defense's Wounded Soldiers Agriculture Association (WSAC) conducted the four-day Training Course on Itik Pinas (IP) and Native Pig Production.

Native animals are considered as important components of agricultural production in rural areas as they augment food supplies, provide high quality protein food, and source of livelihood. Some of the animals that are common in the Philippines are the native pig and IP, a genetically superior breeder duck developed in a project conducted by the Philippine Council for Agriculture, Aquatic and

Natural Resources Research and Development of the Department of Science and Technology and the National Swine and Poultry Research and Development Center of the Bureau of Animal Industry (BAI-NSPRDC).

The training delivered lectures and discussion to help the participants understand production management of native pig and IP.

To showcase the potential by-products and market of native pig, Ian Cabriga of Teofely Nature Farms presented the management and production of native swine. He discussed the preparation of natural concoctions that can be used in this enterprise such as the fermented fruit juice and fermented plant juice.

Likewise, Teofely Nature Farm executive chef Roy Resurreccion guided the participants on preparing

processed native swine by-products such as longaniza and lechon. Prior to these, BAI-NSPRDC chief Dr. Rene Santiago discussed the breeding and production of IP.

During the closing program, ATI-RTC IV-A center director Marites Piamonte-Cosico furthered the Institute's support to the participants by providing four gilts, while Teofely Nature Farms donated one boar.

"Kayo ang mga sundalo na nag-aalay ng buhay para sa bansa. Marapat lamang na bigyan kayo ng ikabubuhay ninyo (You are soldiers who have dedicated your lives for the country. You deserve to receive livelihood opportunities)," Cosico said.

The training was held in Brgy. Biliran, Nasugbu, Batangas last June 3-6, 2019. ★



ATI officials lead the cover reveal of the "From Arms to Farms" success story book in Iligan City.

New Publications launched to promote agriculture

Marianne B. Antonio

ILIGAN CITY, Lanao del Norte—To further empower and inspire Filipinos from different sectors, the Agricultural Training Institute (ATI) remains committed in documenting the transformative power of agriculture.

The Institute, through the Information Services Division, led the cover reveal and launch of its newest publications, the "From Arms to Farms" success story book and "Gastronomica" coffee table book.

"From Arms to Farms" features a collection of inspiring stories of former rebels in Lanao del Norte and Misamis Occidental as they venture into agriculture. These rebel returnees were supported by ATI, local government units, and other partners through capability-enhancement activities and funding for their chosen agribusiness projects.

The publication chronicles the journey of these rebel returnees in reclaiming their life as beneficiaries of the "From Arms to Farms" project.

The stories capture their resiliency, determination, initiatives, and outstanding efforts in battling hunger through farming.

Moreover, through the book, ATI aims to broaden the perspective of Filipinos, especially the youth, on the potential of agriculture to improve their livelihood.

In his speech during the "From Arms to Farms" book cover reveal, ATI Director Alfredo Aton thanked the beneficiaries for sharing "evidences of life-changing experiences and accomplishments in cultivating peace through agriculture."

The ATI Director also expressed appreciation to the local governments of Lanao del Norte and Misamis Occidental and the Armed Forces of the Philippines for their cooperation in the implementation of the project.

"It is remarkable to see that you continue to work with the same love

for country even when the journey to peace and development is not as smooth as we hope it would be," he said as he addressed the rebel returnees who were present at the event.

Meanwhile, "Gastronomica" offers stories and trivia on various dishes and farm products in Northern Mindanao. This book was developed by ATI-Regional Training Center (RTC) X to promote the different farm sites in the region and highlight the farm-to-plate advocacy of the Department of Agriculture.

The "From Arms to Farms" book cover reveal and "Gastronomica" book launch was held through a Pagana-inspired celebration last June 25. Other attendees include directors of ATI-RTCs in Mindanao, Learning Site cooperators in Region X, and partners from Smart Communications, Inc. and Manila Bulletin. ★

Young Filipino farmers advance skills in Japan

Marianne B. Antonio

DILIMAN, Quezon City—Twenty one young Filipino farmers have set foot to Japan to undergo skills training for 11 months.

This was last April 12 after these trainees completed a 75-day pre-departure orientation course (PDOC) which involved training courses on crop production, farm mechanization, swine production, and rice farming. They also took classes in Nihongo and the Japanese culture.

"Our commitment is to do our best as representatives of the country in the development of the agriculture sector," Roberto Diesta, trainee from Region V and batch president, said.

During the PDOC culmination ceremony, Department of Agriculture Assistant Secretary for Operations, Agribusiness, and Marketing Andrew Villacorta reminded the trainees of their role

in the improvement of the country's agriculture, being that they are the "best among all the young farmers."

He also challenged them, especially those engaged in rice farming, to strengthen efforts in rice production in support to the newly signed law on rice tariffication and liberalization.

Meanwhile, Agricultural Training Institute (ATI) Director Alfredo Aton congratulated the trainees and assured them of the Institute's support in all their undertakings as Filipino farm leaders. He advised the trainees to make the best out of their time in Japan to learn new agricultural technologies.

"We need you, our young generation of farmers, to modernize Philippine agriculture," he said.

Other guests during the event were Japan Agricultural Exchange Council (JAEC) Local Coordinator Koji Kaneda, ATI Regional Training Center

directors, regional coordinators, and partner Japanese Language instructors from the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority.

The Young Filipino Farm Leaders' Training Program in Japan is an exchange program managed by the ATI, in partnership with JAEC and the Japan Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries. The program is aimed at encouraging undergraduates of agriculture, fisheries, and business courses, and out-of-school youth to develop their farming ventures and become successful agripreneurs and experts in their respective fields.

This year's batch of trainees include, for the first time, females from different areas nationwide.

The culmination ceremony was held at the ATI Rural Development and Education Center last April 8 in this city. ★

Stakeholders learn new techniques in duck-raising

Ressell Angelie S. Fetalsana

POBLACION, Trento, Agusan del Sur—Thirty agricultural extension workers, barangay agricultural workers (BAWs), farmers, and other agriculture enthusiasts from different parts of Caraga region were updated on new techniques on duck-raising.

This is through the Training on Sustainable Duck Production last June 5-7, 2019 at Jinayon Duck Farm, a Learning Site certified by the Agricultural Training Institute-Regional Training Center (ATI-RTC) XIII.

The participants were able to listen to lectures on the importance, benefits, and opportunities in duck production. They also performed hands-on activities in the farm.

"It was a very informative activity. We thank ATI for giving us the opportunity to join and learn some ways in taking care of the ducks we raise in our backyard. We hope for our duck production industry in Caraga to bloom and have a sufficient supply for its meat and eggs, especially for balut," said Lemuel Sanugan, a BAW from Esperanza, Agusan del Sur.

The three-day event was conducted in support to the National Livestock Program. The program aims to improve the economic status of livestock and poultry raisers by capacitating them with skills and providing them opportunities for additional income. ★



The AEWs learn practices in free-range chicken production from the staff of Feta Farm, an ATI Learning Site in Region XII.

Halal Program exhausts efforts on free-range chicken enterprise

Jessa Mae O. Guiang

KORONADAL CITY—With the government's increasing interest in Halal Free-range Chicken Production as a healthier alternative among other production means, the Agricultural Training Institute-Regional Training Center (ATI-RTC) XII facilitated a five-day Training of Trainers (TOT) on Free-range Chicken Enterprise.

The activity aims to educate agricultural extension workers (AEWs) who are expected to further disseminate information on this technology to the farmers. Likewise, the TOT was conducted to capacitate the participants in terms of providing appropriate knowledge on important aspects of halal poultry production.

This unique poultry system allows chickens to freely roam and have access to organic food such as natural grains and insects in contrast to food grown with pesticides. In addition, practitioners need to make sure that the chickens are certified 'halal' and were raised in strong adherence to the standards set by halal certifiers.

Some 29 AEWs from Region XII showed full support for the venture and actively participated in the training held at ELM Vine Hotel in Koronadal City last March 25-29, 2019.★

Business opportunities in coconut explored at special free seminar

Catheryn M. Villorente

DILIMAN, Quezon City—To help boost the coconut industry in the country, the Agricultural Training Institute (ATI) spearheaded a special free seminar on fresh young coconut.

Experts from the Agricultural Credit Policy Council (ACPC) and the Philippine Coconut Authority (PCA) were invited to talk about the health benefits, uses, and investment opportunities for coconut.

Renato Barriero, project development officer at the ACPC, shared the investment opportunities for smallholder farmers including coconut farmers. One of these is through the Production Loan Easy Access (PLEA) which provides easy access to loans through lending conduits such as cooperatives, non-government organizations, and rural banks.

Through PLEA, a farmer can take a loan of up to Php150,000 for his farming venture. Barriero also discussed the requirements for this and other ACPC loan programs.

PCA's Market Research and Promotions Division chief Rosella

Villaruel discussed the uses, health benefits, and business opportunities related to coconut. With a number of health benefits of coconut water, Villaruel called this the "fluid of life".

"Buko (young coconut) drinks can substitute our vitamin intake, flushes out toxins in our body, and delays aging," she remarked.

She underscored the food business opportunities using buko meat and water as well as on processed coconut products such as coco peat fertilizer, handicrafts, natural dye, and many others.

ATI Director Alfredo Aton graced the event and shared that the special seminar was conducted to help coconut farmers explore value-adding activities, that is aside from copra production. He furthered that the Secretary is keen to help farmers acquire the needed capital for their respective ventures.

About 50 individuals from Metro Manila attended this special free seminar held last April 2, 2019 at the ATI Central Office compound.★

PCA's Market Research and Promotions chief Rosella Villaruel talks about food business opportunities using coconut products.





The resource speakers sit down for a quick question-and-answer session with the participants.

AgriTalk sees CDO's growing interest in urban agriculture

Marianne B. Antonio

CAGAYAN DE ORO CITY—Interest in urban agriculture continues to grow as over 700 farmers and farming enthusiasts in this city gathered for the second of this year's AgriTalk series.

In the activity spearheaded by the Agricultural Training Institute (ATI), participants were provided with information on square-foot gardening, beekeeping, and mushroom production.

As he welcomed the attendees, Dante Simangan, Manila Bulletin Publishing Corporation's Vice President for Circulation, emphasized that AgriTalk is a grand initiative for farmers across generations, including the youth.

Moreover, he assured everyone that the Manila Bulletin will consistently be a partner of the

Department of Agriculture (DA) in strengthening the capacities of farmers nationwide. "We are all concerned about the agriculture situation of the country," he stated.

Likewise, Center Director Ma. Lydia Echavez of the ATI-Regional Training Center X, said that the free seminar helps not only the farmers and farm enthusiasts, but also the youth in their involvement in the agriculture industry.

The Center Director declared that as the training arm of DA, the ATI is "giving focus on out-of-school and in-school youth in terms of expanding their interest and skills in farming."

Meanwhile, Carlota Madriaga, Regional Technical Director for Operations of DA-Regional Field Office (RFO) X, thanked the

organizers for choosing Cagayan De Oro as the venue for the activity.

She noted, "Farmers and farm entrepreneurs of Cagayan De Oro are privileged to learn about new farming technologies from experts."

Speaking to the participants, she furthered: "The technologies you will learn are developed and tested through research which are ready to be applied."

One of the resource speakers during the event was Honorio Cervantes, a retired police officer who is now an expert in square-foot gardening in Cagayan De Oro. He shared his knowledge and experiences in planting organic vegetables in limited spaces.

Cervantes also demonstrated how he makes the most of his 300-square-meter garden to plant vegetables through the square-foot method.

Also included in the line-up of experts were Jocelyn Ellevera and May Shell Tumilap from the DA-RFO X. They, respectively, talked about beekeeping and mushroom production as business opportunities.

The activity was held last May 24 at SM CDO Downtown Premier. It was made possible through the collaboration with the Manila Bulletin Publishing Corporation and the Bureau of Agricultural Research. ★

"We are all concerned about the agriculture situation of the country."



Farmer Entrepreneur



Ginalyn V. Arbutante



*"There is no other sustainable job except farming"
- this is what Mr. Perlito Montañez uttered during his
interview*

"Mang Pepe", as what his neighbors call him, is one of the Learning Site (LS) cooperators of Agricultural Training Institute-Regional Training Center (ATI-RTC) Caraga. His farm adopts the Integrated Diversified Organic Farming System. Aside from livestock, poultry, and organic fertilizer production, he also has organic vegetables in his farm located in Brgy. Adloy, Carrascal, Surigao del Sur.

Mang Pepe, 58, first received assistance from ATI in 2016 when he became an LS cooperator. "I am so blessed and thankful to have staff from ATI Caraga help me and give advice on what to do, particularly on feed formulation, even beyond office hours. Without their assistance, I would not be successful in my endeavor as LS cooperator," he confessed.

When he met ATI

Mang Pepe met ATI by coincidence. There was a time when the demand for organic fertilizer increased and chicken dung was not enough to supply the market's rising need. As he planned to venture into organic fertilizer production, he sought assistance from the Provincial Agriculture Office of Surigao del Sur.

"The Provincial Agriculture Office referred me then to ATI Caraga. I dropped by ATI for the first time and asked about feed formulation or anything that they could offer. [Apparently,] I was on the right track," Mang Pepe stated.

"I've always been curious about feed formulation and I had hoped to formulate my own," Mang Pepe confessed.

Mang Pepe has since attended training conducted by ATI on various topics, such as organic fertilizer production, feed milling, farm machinery, and Organic Agriculture with National Certificate (NC) II. ATI Caraga offered him more trainings and he never refused. For him, every



training is an opportunity and a blessing because what he learned is another application of technology in his own farm that is worth sharing with others. Until, in 2018, his farm became a School for Practical Agriculture, something that he has dreamt of in a long time.

A lifelong learner

For Mang Pepe, age doesn't matter. This was clearly proved by the college degree he earned at the age of 36, through scholarship from the Department of Labor and Employment from 1996 to 2002.

"Being a working student was not easy. I worked in a private feeds company in Cantilan, Surigao del Sur at nighttime and went to school at daytime," he added.

In 2002, he graduated with a degree of Bachelor of Science in Education at Surigao del Sur Institute of Technology, now known as Surigao del Sur State University-Cantilan Campus.

"I never expected to make it to the top with the hardships I encountered that time. I would even bring my son to school when nobody would babysit him," Mang Pepe tearfully recollected.

With an entrepreneurial heart

"I want to experience how it feels to be rich, that's why I never refused any opportunity to venture into business," Mang Pepe smilingly said.

He is full of optimism in life. As LS cooperators, he wants to prove to his constituents that he is worthy to such title by being a model farmer and an entrepreneur rolled into one.

"I believe in not relying only in one source of income. Instead we must diversify and integrate farm activities," advised Mang Pepe.

Mang Pepe observed that it would be better to formulate and produce his own feeds for his pigs and chickens than to purchase outside because he can save a certain peso in every kilo.

In 2016, he ventured on feed milling business. Mang Pepe said that due to financial constraint for the startup, he borrowed money from a private lending firm in their province. "I paid it for 18 months and today, I thank God for the profits. He really blessed my business," he added.

He delivered his produced feeds and organic fertilizer to the mining companies in their province with a minimum of 100 sacks per month. Using the feed mill, Mang Pepe will have savings of Php1,000.00 per day. In his egg production alone, he can have a net income of Php1,500 per day in addition to Php25,000.00 per month from his chicken dung as organic fertilizer. According to him, there is really money in poultry.

"The feed mixer that I received from ATI helped me produce instantly the minimum sacks of feeds in a day, not only for my own consumption but also for others who need it most. All these achievements I have right now were realized through the help of the ATI," Mang Pepe uttered.

A certified winner

"Sometimes, you will be tested towards reaching your goal but challenges in farming is only in the beginning," stated Montanez.

In spite of the challenges and discouragements hurdled by others in farming, he really pursued his passion and proved them that they were wrong.

Mang Pepe strongly believed in time management as key to success. As a risk-taker, he accepts every opportunity that knocks on his door. "When I have the chance to venture on a certain thing, I risk it all, but I just prepare my heart for whatever the outcome is," he said.

Graduated with a degree of Bachelor of Science in Commerce, Merlie Delco landed an office job in the Municipality of Makato. In 1987, she worked as a Community Worker in Gabriel M. Reyes Memorial Foundation, a local foundation in the province of Aklan. However, a salary of Php11 a day was not enough for Merlie to support her siblings; thus, she decided to work in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. Luckily, she was employed at the General Consoles house, she worked as a caregiver and at the same time, she also does office works.

Later on, Merlie got married and started her own family. For the times that she was not with them, her consolation was she'd be able to provide for their needs. She found a good employer, indeed, as she was allowed to go home every two years to visit her family.

she was elected as an officer at the Municipal Agriculture and Fishery Council, as well as the Provincial Agricultural and Fishery Council. In 2008, she served as the chairperson of the High Value Crops Council in their municipality. Combining conventional farming and the natural farming technologies she just had learned, she was able to produce a good harvest.

Until in 2012, when she became one of the enrollees of School-On-the-Air (SOA) on Organic Fertilizer Production implemented by the Agricultural Training Institute - Regional Training Center VI (ATI-RTC VI). The SOA program is one of ATI's distance learning on the complete package of technology of a commodity and other agriculture and fisheries-related subject matter. It is a series of radio programs, presenting the subject matter

about ATI and its programs and services. Thru the SOA, I was able to learn the easy way of preparing various organic concoctions and fertilizers, not only for my consumption but also as a source of additional income. Besides, I was able to help protect mother earth in my own little way.*

Dedicated, passionate, and committed to practice all the lessons she learned during the SOA on Organic Fertilizer production, Merlie did her best such to gather raw materials for vermicomposting.

"People laugh at me every time they see me carrying rice straws and banana stalks, and picking up animal (cow/carabao) manure for my vermicomposting project. They would sometimes murmur at each other about how silly I look. But I didn't care. All I had in mind

HOMECOMING:

Making a better life with organic farming

Deodith Grace H. Baticbatic

As time went by, the long-distance relationship between Merlie and her husband became more difficult. Misunderstandings and miscommunication took its toll. Merlie hoped to save her marriage by deciding to go back to the Philippines, but she was too late. Her husband already left her and their children in exchange for a new family.

Passion in farming began

In 2004, Merlie decided not to go back to Jeddah to raise her seven children. As a single parent, she was determined to provide for their needs. Merlie decided to venture into farming by renting a one-hectare rice land. Being a former employee of the agriculture office in their municipality, she had the opportunity to attend trainings conducted by the local government unit where she learned natural farming technologies. As she became an active farmer-leader,

systematically and in a progressive manner, aired for a period of not less than three months.

The SOA program in region VI has a unique component where the participants of the program get to attend face-to-face classes, aside from the usual listening to the radio broadcast. This is called the Farmer Field School (FFS). During FFS, the participants apply the technologies taught to them during the radio airing.

"During the SOA on Organic Fertilizer Production, we were taught how to make the different organic fertilizers including Fermented Plant Juice (FPJ), Fermented Fruit Juice (FFJ), Fish Amino Acid (FAA), Effective Microorganism, and Organic Herbal Nutrient. We were also taught about vermicast production and its uses," says Merlie.

"I am very thankful to the Lord for giving me an opportunity to learn

was that I needed to produce those organic inputs to be able to use it for my rice and vegetables.*

In 2013, Merlie participated in another SOA program that ATI-RTC VI offered. This time, it was on Organic Vegetable Production. The knowledge and skills she acquired in this SOA program pushed her to venture into organic vegetable production. Eventually, Merlie found herself growing vegetables in a 400 square meter land. pechay, tomato, and ampalaya. In just one cropping period, she was able to earn more than P15,000 in cash for her produce.

Diversifying her farm

Merlie's older sister, saw her determination and decided to help her by providing financial support to establish a vermicomposting facility. According to Merlie, since 2012 when she started to practice vermicomposting, she sold about 7,000 kilos of vermicast or about

Php40,000.00 in cash. While her consumption of vermicast in her rice field and vegetable area were almost the same. Aside from vermicast, she was also selling different concoctions such as FPJ (at Php600.00 per 1.5 liters), FFJ and FAA (both at Php800.00 per 1.5 liters).

The next year after joining her second SOA program, Merlie joined the SOA on Organic Darag Chicken production that the ATI-RTC VI conducted. Out of those 550 people, it was Merlie who was awarded as the first honor of the batch. Winning had its perks. Merlie was given a start-up kit consisting of 15 pullets and two cockerels.

Formulating organic feeds which they also learn during this SOA program is too tedious, but Merlie sustained it for the sake of producing organic darag chicken. To date, Merlie sold almost Php30,000 for darag alone.

She had already expanded her poultry house (from 200 sqm. to 800 sqm.), with 35 heads ready to lay, 30 pullets (3-month-old) cockerels and five hens laying. Aside from her market within the locality and nearby municipality, she had also sold darag to a friend residing abroad.

Aside from the income she earned, Merlie considers her family's consumption of safe and healthy food of more importance. In addition, her fellow farmers in the nearby barangays were already emulating her practices such as the production of organic concoctions and organic vegetables.

"Now I am very happy to see my neighbors doing the same practice," she says. "They would ask how I make my concoctions, and I am happy to teach them. Sometimes, I would ask the agricultural technician inviting me to attend trainings if I could invite some of my neighbors to attend, too. I am more than happy to share my knowledge to my fellow farmers. With that, we can do our little own share of protecting our environment, aside from producing healthy food for our family. Lastly, there really is money in farming. It just a matter of 'sipog at tiyoga'."



Rice farming innovations celebrated

Marianne B. Antonio

PASAY CITY—Top rice-producing provinces, cities, and municipalities, as well as outstanding farmers' associations, in 2018 were recognized during the latest Rice Achievers Awards.

Various local government units, irrigators' associations, and small water irrigation systems associations received trophies and cash prizes for their exemplary contributions in rice farming.

Senator Cynthia Villar, chairperson of the Senate Committee on Agriculture and Food, congratulated these achievers as she gave the keynote message during the awarding ceremony.

"You all made sure that rice remains a staple in the Filipino household and significantly contributed to our rice production," she said.

The senator also highlighted the present administration's efforts to help rice farmers nationwide which include free irrigation and the Rice Tariffication Law.

Villar stressed that local rice farmers will benefit from the programs supported by the law. She explained that, under the law, the government primarily enforces a tariff scheme on rice importation as part of the country's agreement with the World Trade Organization in 1995.

Likewise, Engr. Ariel Cayanan, Undersecretary for Operations of the Department of Agriculture (DA), expressed the Department's gratitude to the rice farmers, in behalf of Secretary Manny Piñol.

"In many ways, our ability to produce rice is a measure of our strength as a nation," he said.

Cayanan acknowledged the contributions of farmers in ensuring food security. He furthered, "Food security is not only an issue of public policy. Food security is a matter of survival."

Meanwhile, Randy Buen, Kuta Pawa Small Water Irrigation Systems

Association president, extended their appreciation for the government's assistance in their pursuit for development.

"We thanked the government for all the opportunities that they have opened for us," he stated.

Other key officials of the Department including its attached bureaus and agencies, the National Irrigation Administration, and governors and mayors from different provinces and municipalities were among the guests at the awarding ceremony.

The Rice Achievers Awards is an annual recognition for rice industry achievers that aims to motivate rice farmers to contribute more in the country's rice-sufficiency efforts.

This prestigious gathering led by the DA, in coordination with the Agricultural Training Institute, was held last May 30, 2019 at the Philippine International Convention Center. ★



Senator Cynthia Villar leads the distribution of trophies and checks to the recipients of the 2018 Rice Achievers Awards.



Persons with disability in Kiamba receive starter kits for their organic free-range chicken enterprise

PWDs in SOX, BARMM ready to raise chickens after training

Ma. Theresa B. Laxamana

KIAMBA, Sarangani—"I learned a lot as I listened to the lectures. I've raised chickens before, but my management practices seemed not appropriate. Thank you so much for making the effort to reach out to us. Hopefully, after five months, our chickens will increase to 30-40 heads," Kiamba Persons with Disability (PWD) Association vice president Artelistes Peduca said during one of the training activities of the Agricultural Training Institute (ATI).

Peducas is one of the 32 participants during the three-day Training on Organic Free-range Chicken held in Kiamba, Sarangani on June 5-7, 2019. The activity was conducted by ATI-Regional Training Center (RTC) XII, in cooperation with the Municipal Agriculture Office (MAO) of Kiamba.

Kiamba MAO's resident veterinarian, Dr. Amor Elevazo, shared practical tips in raising free-range chickens. The participating PWDs also immersed at the Municipal Demo Farm where they saw a model free-range chicken barn and observed how to conduct vaccination and other management practices of chicken.

During the closing ceremonies, the trainees received not only their training certificates but also several heads of free-range chickens. The participants with high test score increments were also given poultry feeds, vitamins, feeders, and waterers as prizes.

Meanwhile, a similar training was also conducted for 33 PWDs in Matanog, Maguindanao in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region

in Muslim Mindanao on June 12-14, 2019. The training tapped the expertise of Toto Laguialaot, a successful Maguindanao free-range chicken raiser who is also the chairperson of the Halal Producers' Cooperative in Kabacan, North Cotabato and a graduate of the Farmers Poultry School conducted by ATI-RTC XII.

The trainees also brought home free-range chickens after the training to start their own livelihood projects. Armed with new knowledge and skills, ATI-RTC XII officials congratulated the participants on their achievements and willpower to change the meaning of "PWD" to "Persons with Determination". ★

ATI, Smart Communications launch Digital Farmers Program

Angelica Marie T. Umali

MAKATI CITY—The Agricultural Training Institute (ATI) and Smart Communications, Inc. Public Affairs Group have sealed the deal that will further expand their reach in capacity development and technology inclusion which are highly essential for the agriculture sector.

Through the Digital Farmers Program (DFP), the youth will be engaged in a three-course sequence focusing on acquainting, capacitating, and empowering small-holder farmers with basic digital tools and technologies, particularly social media, climate and weather monitoring applications, and e-Farming, among others.

Moreover, the DFP intends to harness the high technology-

adaptability skills of the youth in actively onboarding small-holder farmers into the digital space, and consequently, establishing a solid channel of idea-exchange from using modern agricultural technologies to discovering old-age farming traditions passed down through generations.

Parallel to Agriculture Secretary's directive, this program hopes to produce various agricultural content based on the wisdom and practices of farmers. These will later be uploaded and shared in various information and communications technology platforms.

Ramon Isberto, head of Smart's Public Affairs Group, stressed that it is high time that the private sector come in and be a "partner-enabler"

of the farming community. "We want to be a partner of ATI and we commit to bring our expertise in technology to help the agriculture sector," he added.

Isberto and ATI Director Alfredo Aton led the signing of the memorandum of understanding. ATI Information Services Division chief Antonieta Arceo and regional training center directors Marites Piamonte-Cosico and Maria Lydia Echavez from regions IV-A and X, respectively, were also present to witness the event.

Four batches of the DFP are already set to roll out in the third quarter of this year in the provinces of Cavite, Laguna, Batangas, and Rizal.

The DFP MOU signing was held on June 7, 2019 at the Makati Garden Club in this city. ★



ATI Director Alfredo Aton and Smart Public Affairs head Ramon Isberto lead the MOU signing for the Digital Farmers Program.



Learning about Organic Agriculture at GerNil's Farm

Melody S. Co

I wish we had more time to spend at GerNil's Farm for this year's 10th Organic Agriculture trip with the Agricultural Training Institute (ATI). Gawad Saka awardee Gerardo "Boy" Cordero is a wonderful host and conversationalist, perhaps due to his wealth of experiences in organic farming. His farm is a School for Practical Agriculture under ATI in SOCCSKSARGEN (SOX). I highly recommend passing by this farm to eat, walk around, and let Mr. Cordero impart his learning, experiments, and wisdom, especially if you have that dream to plant someday even in an urban setting like Manila! He has coconuts, mangosteen, cacao, palay, pala-isdaan, pigs, and other farm animals.

"GerNil" came from the owners' combined names, Gerardo and Nilda. It was accredited in 2014 as an ATI Learning Site and promoted one year later as School for Practical Agriculture. This year, they are vying to be one of the few Farm Tourism Sites in SOX, with their farm practices as their tourism activities, in accordance with the Farm Tourism Development Act of 2016.

They went organic 11 years ago. What I noticed was the abundance of shade and coconuts in their farm. The trees are also spaced properly which contribute to the aesthetics of the place.

A smiling Mr. Cordero greeted us. He told us that he has three farming sites and he believes in the 10x10 (meters) or less spacing for coconuts, cacao, mangosteen, lanzones, and other trees because land sizes are getting smaller per generation. He is also an advocate of medicinal herbs and plants.

We tasted his homemade tablea hot chocolate and we couldn't stop getting a second and third cup! Lunch was another memorable activity. They served "pato-tim" (patatim made of duck), ginataang native chicken with ubad (core of banana stalk), black rice, and the yummiest vegetarian lechon! For their signature drink, they taught us how to make "katangsi"—kamote tops, tanglad (lemongrass), and calamansi.

Manong Boy received a Gawad Saka award for the coconut-based farming category, so naturally, we shouldn't dismiss his collection of coconuts! We took a short van trip to his other farm site. There we found rows upon rows of coconuts! It was like a mini plantation where they collect coconut sap and make coco sugar and coco syrup!

Of course, Mr. Cordero said no to monocropping. This is five hectares of organic diversified farming integrating plants with animals. The ATI is helping him fund the design of his three-storey structure for ducks (pato), lamb (tupa), goat (kambing), and African night crawlers. All the animals' dung goes down to a slot right next to the vermiculture area, so it's automated and easier.

He told us that the soil is like a bank. The plant sucks all the nutrients and when it is depleted, you will need to deposit what it has lost, so you put vermicompost. You get cheap farm inputs and lessen your farm waste in the process.

I would love to visit his farm again! Mr. Cordero is very approachable and open to answer questions about his farm, fruit trees, and organic agriculture.

DA SECRETARY WILLIAM DAR'S

8 PARADIGMS

TO LEVEL UP PH AGRICULTURE

1
Modernization
must continue



5
Infrastructure
development would
be critical

2
Industrialization
of agriculture is key



6
Higher budget
and investment
for Philippine agriculture

3
Promotion of exports
is a necessity



7
Legislative support
is needed

4
Consolidation
of small-and-medium-
size farms



8
Roadmap development
is paramount



“Through RCEF, we hope to uplift the practices and lives of our farmers who are our main partners in achieving rice security. Their success will pave way for available, affordable, accessible, safe, and nutritious rice for the Filipinos.”

- Manong Willie Dar
Secretary, Department of Agriculture