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AGRICULTURE

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AGRICULTURE AMID COVID-19

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ACCESS

THE OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE AGRICULTURAL TRAINING INSTITUTE

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KADIWA

Offers Farmers' Produce During Quarantine Period

Jayvee P. Masilang

Farmers' produce will be on sale in various points in Metro Manila and other parts of the country as the Department of Agriculture (DA) rolls out KADIWA ni Ani at Kita.

KADIWA, which stands for "Katuwang sa Diwa at Gawa para sa Masaganang Ani at Mataas na Kita", is a marketing strategy of the Department which directly connects food producers to consumers, thereby lessening the cost of the products up to 20 percent than those at the market.



Getting started

The initiative started off at the Agricultural Training Institute (ATI) last March 25-26 as fresh vegetables and other food products were displayed and sold for the residents of Quezon City.

Dar has also instructed the heads of DA agencies in the National Capital Region to identify available spaces in their compound for the establishment of their respective “Kadiwa ni Ani at Kita” stalls to provide more options for the public to access affordable products.

The agri exec enjoins other farmers to participate in KADIWA which will be carried out every week through the DA-Agribusiness and Marketing Assistance Service (AMAS).

“Kindly coordinate with your provincial and regional DA offices for them to link you with AMAS, and together let us provide affordable and accessible food for our countrymen,” Dar said.

Linking with LGUs

Under its Distribution and Marketing System, there will be two different modes where DA will find suppliers to the food requirements of the residents of areas affected by the imposed quarantine.

Under mode 1, DA will directly link local government units (LGUs) of metro areas

to food producers and facilitate delivery. For mode 2, the Department will link LGUs and producers to deliver items to identify drop-off points. For both modes, the LGUs will sort and pack the items for delivery to households.

“We are ready to assist our LGUs in metro areas to ensure our stable food supply throughout the country. As much as possible, let’s do it within our communities where supplies are already available,” Dar explained.

This is also part of DA’s effort to forge stronger ties with the LGUs to ensure that households affected by the enhanced community quarantine will have access to food supply.

Moving forward

To roll out immediate interventions for food production and availability, food accessibility and affordability, and food price stabilization, the Department has requested for a Php32 billion supplemental fund for the expeditious implementation of the “Ahon Lahat, Pagkaing Sapat Kontra sa COVID-19” or ALPAS COVID-19, on top of the existing agriculture programs.

From the requested additional budget, Php1 billion will be used for upscaling KADIWA ni Ani at Kita, including production monitoring, provincial services on wheels, transportation and trucking services of produce from source to the Metropolis, and the provision for KADIWA on Wheels.



Techno Gabay partners

continue service amid community quarantine

Erika Z. Vizcarra

Farmers' Information and Technology Services (FITS) Centers and Magsasaka Siyentistas (MS) nationwide are dedicating their resources to help their respective communities despite limitations in mobility this quarantine period.

Agriculture offices in different local government units (LGUs) that operate FITS Centers and partner farmers who serve as MS have opted to continue providing agricultural services amid the ongoing community quarantine measures. This is to help address the needs not only of farming and fishing communities but also of other households in their locality.

Some of these services include the provision of vegetable seeds, distribution of identification cards and quarantine passes to farmers and agricultural workers, and continuous monitoring of farming activities in their respective areas.

In the Cordillera Administrative Region (CAR), agriculture offices are coordinating the transport and marketing of vegetable produce from the local farmers. Some are

also assisting in the distribution of relief goods in different barangays.

Likewise, agriculture offices and FITS Centers in CALABARZON continue to allow farmers to access their services while observing safety measures. In Magdalena, Laguna, the FITS Center initially opened their milling facility for rice farmers and offered affordable rice to the locals. Now, their priority is to provide the milling services needed for rice packs that will be distributed to the residents.

In Tanauan, Batangas, which was also affected by the eruption of Taal Volcano, the city agriculture office provided residents with fresh vegetables bought from the local farmers. In General Nakar, Quezon, fresh vegetables were included in the relief packs distributed in the barangays.

In Laguna, FITS Centers in Pangil and Siniloan distributed free vegetable seeds and continue to promote community backyard farming through social media for easy access to nutritious food. Kalayaan FITS Center also opened their doors to residents who want to buy fresh produce from local farmers.



Staff of the agriculture office in Pila, Laguna distribute delivery passes to farmers, fishers, dealers, traders, and other agricultural service providers at their FITS Center. (photo by Pila FITS Center)

The municipal agriculture office in Remedios T. Romualdez, Agusan del Norte is also set to distribute over 750 packs of 8-in-1 “pinakbet” vegetable seeds to eight barangays and four schools with “Gulayan sa Paaralan” projects this April. This is part of the province’s contingency and recovery plan for COVID-19 for the agriculture sector.

Aside from seed distribution, they will also conduct briefings on urban farming and distribute related information, education, and communication materials from the FITS Center.

Other ongoing and upcoming interventions of the municipal agriculture office are the processing of crop insurance application for farmers affected by rat infestation and distribution of palay seeds and fertilizer to rice farmers not covered by the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund. At present, they are operating on a four-day work week and are mostly coordinating rice harvest activities of the local farmers.

“We are now at the peak of harvest season, so farmers are getting in touch with us most of the time. [If we don’t assist them], what will the farmers eat?” municipal agriculturist and FITS Center manager Maria Nenita Daohog said in an interview.

Agricultural and FITS staff in Remedios T. Romualdez are also directed to be part of the local workforce manning the checkpoints in the area. This is also the case in some agriculture offices in other parts of the country.

In Davao Region, some MS are also helping out in their own way. Benjamin Lao of Bansalan, Davao del Sur offers free delivery services for customers of their farm. Some of the products they sell include organic vegetables, chicken, goat’s milk, and processed goods like turmeric tea and coco sugar.

In Guimaras, Rebecca Tubongbanua, MS of the provincial FITS Center, provided five boxes of calamansi juice for frontline workers in the area. This was done last March 24, through her company McNester Food Products.

The FITS Center and MS are components of the Techno Gabay Program which serves as one of the modalities of the Agricultural Training Institute in bringing extension services in the countryside.

With the initiatives of these institutions and individuals during this quarantine period, Bayanihan efforts in the different communities are expected to grow and reach more Filipinos.

EXTENDING LEARNING AND KINDNESS:

LEARNING SITE COOPERATORS OFFER
ASSISTANCE IN THE TIME OF COVID-19

Marianne B. Antonio

Cooperators of Learning Sites for Agriculture (LSAs) and Extension Service Providers (ESPs) of the Agricultural Training Institute (ATI) are cultivating seeds of compassion as they help their communities in their own ways during the global pandemic.

Since the alarming spread of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) in the country, the whole of Luzon, including the entire Metro Manila, and some parts of Visayas and Mindanao have been placed in an Enhanced Community Quarantine (ECQ).

While the Department of Agriculture has already imposed protocols in terms of continuous movement of agricultural products, closure of several borders in cities and provinces, and the strict quarantine measures have still disrupted the operations of smallholder farms.

During these challenging times, some ATI LSA and ESP cooperators in different parts of the country heed the call for help in coping with the ECQ period. Some of them have helped fellow farmers in selling their farm products online, while the others have been providing easy access to food among households. Many of them have also found innovative ways to continue providing knowledge on agriculture and fisheries.

Alternative ways of farm product marketing

Emma Tolentino, owner of Eco Natural Integrated Farm in Victoria, Tarlac, has turned to social media to sell some of her farm products as the ECQ restricted movements of people in the province. She maximizes the use of social networking sites to connect with buyers and schedule pickup of the products in her farm.

As a trainer and consultant in organic farming for several years and with her active participation in various agricultural activities in the region, Tolentino has gained vast network on social media. She also makes use of this platform to help her fellow farmers market their products online.

"I have seen how farmers are having difficulties in selling their products since the start of the quarantine and most of them do not know online marketing," she said in an interview.

Tolentino stated that she has also been coordinating strongly with key agencies and offices in the province, as well as potential buyers, to help smallholder farmers earn even during the ECQ. Apart from these, she is also teaching mushroom production and processing to some industry growers through group chats.

She noted, "I also teach them how to make natural antibiotic immunity booster for humans and animals."

By calling attention to the predicament of farmers severely affected in these times, Tolentino hopes that she can help in the little ways she can. "That's my contribution," she added.

In Lantapan, Bukidnon, Henry Binahon, owner of Binahon Agroforestry Farm (BAFF), has been implementing door-to-door delivery of farm products in nearby areas and cities. He coordinated with concerned local government units to offer this service in areas of Poblacion and along the highways of Lantapan, Malaybalay, and Valencia.

"This is to make food available in homes as COVID preventive measures are in place, and to cope in terms of the survival needs of our farm workers and operations," he said.

BAFF offers two sets of packages, particularly the veggie basket and veggie basket plus, which also contains poultry products and some healthy refreshments. Orders are taken online and the door-to-door delivery began last March 21.

Last March 23, BAFF also distributed some bottles of healthy fruit refreshments to frontliners of Bethel Baptist Hospital, Inc. in Malaybalay.



Teaching from home

In CALABARZON, ATI-assisted learning sites are promoting agricultural learning from home. In this time of quarantine, they have been bringing knowledge at people's fingertips.

Gigi Morris, of MoCA Family Farm RLearning Center in Padre Garcia, Batangas, has stepped up her game in providing agricultural learning venues for farmers and agri enthusiasts through audio-visual online classrooms. A series of learning videos has been uploaded in the farm's Facebook page covering topics on the basics of plant growth, plant management, methods of applying fertilizers, and the science behind irrigation.

Morris began this initiative last March 31. She said that they have fast-tracked some agri modules "so new and beginning family farmers can access more agri information from home."

Similarly, Brian Belen of Ato Belen's Farm, located in San Pablo, Laguna, partnered with the ATI Regional Training Center in CALABARZON for the first roll-out of Agricultural Technologies thru Internet at Home (ATI@Home). This undertaking aims to continue the provision of knowledge in agriculture and fisheries in the region through online free seminars. The first live seminar on container gardening is scheduled on April 8.

Free training after quarantine

While Lourdes Biscocho, of Biscocho Integrated Organic Farm in San Rafael, Bulacan, has set aside teaching organic farming in the meantime and started looking for possible measures that will help farmers recover from the effects of the ECQ. She explained her plans on conducting free training programs after the quarantine. Biscocho is looking at providing farmers an avenue to learn about organic farming and container gardening after the health crisis. Food, accommodation, and shuttle service during the training will also be provided for the farmers for free.

Biscocho expressed, "This is to encourage more people to plant and further promote the importance of growing their own food especially when health crisis arises. I am still thinking of ways on how to make it (free training) happen."



Supporting frontliners

Josephine Costales, of Costales Nature Farms in Majayjay, Laguna, pursued another mission as a backliner in the time of the pandemic. Since March 22, the farm owner spends her time preparing meals and providing healthy refreshments for the healthcare workers of Majayjay and the military personnel manning the checkpoints in the said province.

“Backliners will continuously support our frontliners,” she affirmed. In these challenging times, these farm owners have gone beyond their normal ways in serving their communities. Now more than ever, they have nurtured seeds of kindness and compassion that will, ultimately, go a long way even after the pandemic ends.





SQUARE-FOOT

to feed a family of 4

Karl Louise M. Salibio

With plenty of time at home, there are a lot of things we can do to keep us occupied. Gardening can be a great way to productively pass the time during social distancing, self-quarantine, and self-isolation while also adding some food on our table, and potentially earning a bit more. In addition, since most of the schools and work are closed until further notice, gardening is one way to keep you entertained and productive. With more hands to help, this is also a good family activity that is fun and self-sufficient.

Got not so much space? Try square-foot gardening. With just a small space—in the backyard, rooftop, or even your balcony, you can already grow crops that can suffice for a family of four members.

Square-foot gardening is a system of laying out the planting area and maintaining a productive and attractive garden in any amount of space. The

garden is based on a grid of one-foot by one-foot squares, with single seeds or plants placed in carefully determined spacing. This method is all organic and uses no harmful fertilizers, insecticides, or pesticides. Best of all, it requires less tools, no hard work, reduces water by 90 percent, and has no weeds.

Step 1: Wooden Board

The standard size for a square-foot garden is 4ft by 4ft box. Depending on the availability of the space in your home, this size can always be modified. Screw wooden boards together to make a 4'x4' box. Pick a sunny, flat spot to place the box. Lay down some cardboard or weed-blocking fabric and place the frame on top of it. Make sure that the box can fill in soil to a minimum depth of 6 inches.



Step 2: The Soil

The soil mix inside a square foot garden is an indispensable element in this method on gardening. Your square-foot garden only needs 6 to 8 inch of this mix then you're ready to plant. The composition is 1/3 compost, 1/3 carbonized rice hull (CRH), and 1/3 sandy garden soil.

Step 3: The Grid

Use a string to make your grid. In each square of the grid, you can have either of the following:

- Small – plant sixteen (16) in each square placed three (3) inches apart
- Medium – plant nine (9) in each square placed four (4) inches apart
- Large – plant four (4) in each square placed six (6) inches apart
- Extra Large – plant only one (1) seed in each square foot; place it in the middle of the square

Step 4: Care and Maintenance

Your square-foot garden should last several years without changing the soil, just by adding new fresh organic soil or compost. Water lightly, like rain, every other day, but only in the mornings (plants that are wet at night will get fungus and die). Remember not to step on the soil/plants.

Return of Investment

A square-foot garden is designed as a gardening method to provide food for the table for every family. It is not designed for mass production but only for family consumption. Anyhow, if there will be extra produce and if you intend to sell some of them at a retail price, here is the estimated return of investment for planting pechay.

Expenses:

In Cervantes Square Foot Garden, they use a concrete precast so that the square-foot garden will last longer than the usual wooden square-foot garden. Thus, their expenses are:

1 bag cement @ Php260.00/bag = Php260.00
 3 bags screened sand @ Php30.00/bag = Php90.00
 2 pcs 8mm steel rods @ Php80.00/pc = Php160.00
 2 kg used tarpaulin @ Php50.00/kg = Php100.00
TOTAL = Php610.00

This expense can make five (5) sets of square-foot garden precast.

Other expenses include:

4 L mollasses @ Php20.00/L = Php80.00
 1 sachet seed @ Php80.00/sachet = Php80.00
TOTAL= Php160.00

Precast Expense = Php610.00
 Other Expenses = Php160.00
TOTAL = Php770.00

1 square-foot = 4 hills of pechay
 4 hills of pechay= 1 kilogram (average)
 1 kilogram x 16 square-foot = 16 kg of pechay x 5
 standard size gardens = 80kg of pechay

At a retail price, a kilogram of pechay sells at Php50.00 per kilo. Hence: Php4,000.00 (gross income) – Php770.00 (expenses)

Net income = Php3,230.00

If you have thought about growing a vegetable garden in the past but didn't have time, while you are under orders to stay home and living on less income, take advantage of this opportunity to start a garden. Get the whole family involved and dig in!

E-LEARNING:

A PERK OF STAYING AT HOME

Eula Dee A. Lañada

Staying at home for so long because of the enhanced community quarantine (ECQ) can sometimes put you in a slump. One day you're reading a book and dancing to the beat of Michael Jackson and the next, you're out of something to do. You don't even know what time or day it is.

Time has either been your constant ally or biggest enemy. It is on your side when you are productive, but it's your enemy when you are just counting the days to go outside and bask in the warmth of the summer sun. To end this battle with time and to make yourself more productive, I would like you to introduce to e-Learning.

e-Learning is basically learning using electronic technologies or gadgets to access educational curriculum outside of a traditional classroom. It refers to a course, program, or degree delivered completely online.

This has been a component of the Agricultural Training Institute's (ATI) e-Extension Program for Agriculture and Fisheries. e-Learning has been serving as ATI's platform to offer alternative means of acquiring new knowledge and skills on agriculture and fisheries since 2007.

Fortunately, in 2016, ATI has started offering e-Learning courses which can be accessed through mobile devices and tablets. There are even courses available for download and offline browsing. Those who venture into e-Learning are mostly extension workers, students, farmers, farming enthusiasts, and overseas Filipino workers. It has even reaped around 60,000 registered users and produced around 40,000 graduates within 10 years from the courses offered.

In fact, Ronel De Guzman, Instructor I at President Ramon Magsaysay State University (PRMSU) in Zambales, shared a handful of certificates from finishing e-Learning courses. He said that ever since he was a student, he wanted to try e-Learning but his faulty internet connection got in the way. Now that he has a stable connection, he is able to log in everyday.

"The main reason why I tried e-Learning is I that wanted to learn more about agriculture. It would deepen my knowledge on various topics in agriculture as well as develop some skills necessary for my professional development as an agriculturist and a teacher," said Ronel when asked what pushed him to try e-Learning.

Ronel also added that he is enjoying learning through the platform. "I am refreshed about the production practices and learning new significant things about agriculture. I was able to use my time efficiently and I got certificate as well, so I am grateful," he added.

Because of its features, e-Learning is very accessible and convenient for students, teachers, and other enthusiasts. They can learn anywhere and anytime if they have an internet connection. Ronel said that it is an advantage that there are a lot of courses to choose from. "After finishing the courses on crops, I would like to try the courses on animals so that I will not only enrich my knowledge in my major but also learn other topics as well," he quipped.

Having finished a lot of courses, he had a hard time choosing his favorites. However, at the top of his head would be Basic Urban Gardening; Organic Fertilizer for Sustainable Agriculture; and Production of High Value Vegetables in Greenhouses. As a teacher, he said that these courses served as an inspiration while making his lecture materials. Ronel also plans to set up a simple greenhouse for his high school students so that they can experience and realize the significance of agriculture despite their young age.

Instead of wasting your time on useless things like stalking someone on social media and getting frustrated over fake news, you can opt to channel that energy into something more productive. Be like Ronel and take free e-Learning courses instead.

e-Learning offers courses on different topics ranging from crops, social technology, livestock and poultry, sustainable agriculture, and fisheries.

After finishing a course, it feels like you are falling into a black hole where you cannot stop browsing through the topics. However, it's a black hole worth getting sucked into because you are learning and not wasting your precious time. You will also receive a certificate after each course. Now, that's a win-win situation.

When asked if he would recommend e-Learning to others, Ronel replied with a resounding "yes." He shared that he even posted the certificates online so that his students and even co-faculty members would be aware of it.

"This (e-Learning) would be a purposeful activity during the ECQ and it would be one positive effect of having internet connection. This is better than posting and sharing memes in social media," he added. Ronel vouched that e-Learning can develop knowledge and skills in agriculture which is very important nowadays, especially in his field of work.

Now, to make the most out of your idle time, why not give e-Learning a try? You only need a decent internet connection and a gadget (either laptop or phone) to get started. Just follow these four easy steps:

1. Log on to www.e-extension.gov.ph/elearning
2. Create a new account
3. Pick a course
4. Enjoy

It's as simple as that. You might even want to prepare sweet potato fries and munch it along your journey. Happy e-Learning!



BACK TO BASICS:

FAITH GARDENING AMID COVID 19

Algene G. Domincel

With the enhanced community quarantine, everyone is asked to stay at home. Thus, we are reminded to go back to the basics and one way to survive this COVID-19 pandemic is to make a survival garden.

The Department of Agriculture (DA) has identified high value crops like eggplant, bottle gourd, tomato, and bitter gourd, among others, that can be grown right in the backyard. Aside from the profitability of these crops, they are easy to grow for home consumption.

For its nutritious value, eggplant contains a variety of anti-oxidants and phytonutrients that can help in lowering cholesterol, fighting infections, and preventing degenerative diseases. Bottle gourd, on the other hand contains carbohydrates, minerals, and vitamins. Tomatoes are good for the heart as it helps prevent premature aging and reduces the risk of chronic diseases. Furthermore, it also contains lycopene, an anti-oxidant which destroys cancer-causing free radicals in the body. Aside from the medicinal value that bitter gourd has, it is also a good source of Vitamins A, B and C, iron, folic acid, phosphorus, and calcium.

DA Secretary William Dar has stressed that “we need to feed our bodies with the essential nutrients to keep it functioning at top capacity.” That’s why planting vegetables for home consumption is basic. He further said that there is no miracle food to fight COVID-19 but he encourages the public to do a whole-diet, mostly plant-based preferably from one’s own garden.

While it takes a lot of effort and time to grow these crops, we are actually providing our homes longer supply of food. Let us bring back the basics by growing our own crops. Let this be our fair share in maintaining our food supply while we stay at home. Imagine how economical it would be to grow our food while staying healthy. So, let’s make Food Always Available in the Home (FAITH).

To learn about Good Agricultural Practices for Vegetable Production, visit www.e-extension.gov.ph/elearning and enroll in our online course. Together let’s grow our own food and fight COVID 19. Happy farming!

in
sights



TRANSFORMING LEARNING

DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Ardniel Baladjay, PhD



Being in the academe for two decades now, I find joy and contentment in molding young minds with relevant knowledge, appropriate skills, and right attitude in all the things they are committed to accomplish.

As a mentor and learning facilitator, I always look for innovative and updated ways of teaching my students. Aside from the usual lecture-discussion teaching strategy, I always see to it that the learners are deeply involved in the teaching-learning processes, thus, making them more adept and responsive to the learning contents.

I believe that every challenge that comes our way should be seen as an opportunity to learn. Yes, the COVID-19 pandemic greatly affected my work setup. I often tell my students how I am always excited to meet my class-- to teach and learn from them as well. However, this routinary work is hindered during this time of health crisis.

Using the e-learning modality is quite challenging for my students since most of them come from rural areas with hard-to-reach telecommunication signals. Also, some even told me that they do not have enough budget to regularly check their online learning materials and activities.

But on the positive note, we still make sure to continue connecting with each other by reminding them to find time to comply with their requirements and be ready with their individual outputs when classes resume. A group chat was also created to this effect headed by one student leader who serves as the bridge of the class.

I even volunteered to open and enroll one of my students in the e-Learning Program of the Agricultural Training Institute since he has poor signal in his community, and "waay pa kwarta si nanay pang load sir sa cellphone" (my mother has no money yet to load our cellphone sir). Another student also expressed that there is free Wi-Fi in their barangay but with limited time slot. This feedback truly breaks my heart. Being empathic, we need to understand and use differentiated learning for our students to embrace some changes in teaching-learning delivery.

Personally, the different e-courses are very exciting, refreshing (with the assumption that I have my prior learning), self-enriching, and rewarding since after the e-course requirements are complied, an e-certificate is also awarded. This e-learning motivates me to wake up early just to catch up with the fast signal while doing my morning routine at home as well as to checking updates and outputs of my students. With the e-learning platform of the ATI, my day instantly becomes intellectually productive and makes me stay connected with my students.

Ardniel Baladjay, PhD is an Associate Professor and Extension Director of the Department of Agricultural Extension, College of Agriculture and Extension in the University of Southern Mindanao.



Guided by protocols on **Enhanced Community Quarantine** on social and physical distancing, and considering skeletal work force on barest minimum, the following measures are hereby implemented.

BASED ON DA MEMORANDUM CIRCULAR NO. 7 AND 9 OF 2020

#1

AGRI ACTIVITIES

All farming and fishing activities shall be allowed to continue.

#2

FARMERS AND FISHERS

All healthy farmers and farm workers, fishers and agribusiness personnel shall be **exempted** from restricted movement.

#3

AGRI OPERATIONS

Operations of agricultural supply stores/ outlets and veterinary clinics shall be allowed.

#4

AGRI SUPPLIES

Movement of all supplies for agriculture and fisheries including food packaging and manufacturing materials shall be unhampered.

#5

LOCAL PRICE

Local Price Coordination Councils (LPCCs) are reactivated to strengthen price monitoring and enforcement (MC77).

#6

KADIWA

KADIWA ni Ani at Kita shall be upscaled to ensure food availability, accessibility, and price stability.

#7

ALPAS-COVID 19

ALPAS COVID-19 Program (**Ahon Lahat, Pagkain, Sapat kontra COVID-19**) of the DA shall be supported.



#FIGHTCOVID

#ISHAREKNOWLEDGE | #ATIInspire | #ATILEADS