



# mor·pho·ses

ATI's Treasury of Inspiring Stories



Department of Agriculture  
AGRICULTURAL TRAINING INSTITUTE



## M O R P H O S E S

ATI's Treasury of Inspiring Stories

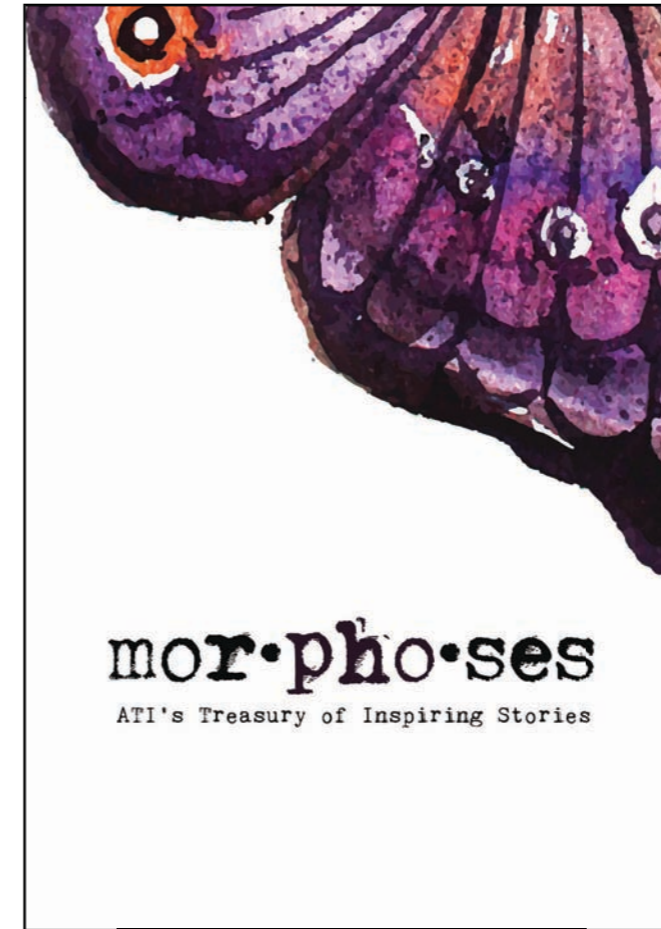
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# About the cover

The leaf-eating critter has metamorphosed into a winged creature—this, usually, is the story we have in mind when we talk about butterflies. However, beneath that beauty is a process, and in that process is a build-up. In the same way, this book represents that process. Written here are stories of change, transformation, and development in the life of our farmers and extension workers throughout the Philippines. In closing this book, you will have rejoiced over the trials conquered and triumphs won. Can you hear these wings flutter by now?

The Department of Agriculture–Agricultural Training Institute works in building dreams and changing the lives of our stakeholders, and it is our joy to report to you our accomplishments for this promise. This compilation is a celebration of agriculture, a hope pollinated, and a tangible proof that success is possible in passion and persistence. We're not done yet.



# mor·pho·ses

ATI's Treasury of Inspiring Stories

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# Preface

## MORPHOSES

This is a compilation of the journey and transformation of farmers, fishers, extension workers, organizations, and other partners from rural communities at large in improving their lives and of other people by working hand in hand with the Agricultural Training Institute (ATI).

Written by information officers, media production specialists, agriculturists, training supervisors, development officers and other technical staff in the ATI's Central Office and its network of training centers, this compilation of stories reflects not only the success of the clients but also their challenges, efforts, and milestones in overcoming the failures they encountered. It also champions the noble deeds and sacrifices of our extension workers from the local government units and personnel from our training centers to help these communities reach their potentials.

This book also highlights the importance of the ATI in the development and sustainability of the agriculture programs in the country. It seeks to uphold understanding on the functions of the Institute and communicate the vital role that it plays in nation-building, underscoring the impact of the Institute's extension and training programs in uplifting the lives of our farmers, fishers, women, and youth in terms of income, productivity, return of investments, and living conditions not only as individuals, but as a family and as a community.

Standing as a memento, "Morphoses: ATI's Treasury of Inspiring Stories" is a tangible proof that through effective programs, a positive outlook and continued efforts we can change lives.

As the ATI celebrates its 30 years of excellent extension services, we will continue to go beyond boundaries to transform communities and its people. We will continue to tell these stories. This is a promise that we, at the Institute, will continue to work on for the fulfilment of its purpose and strive to capacities to produce more food. Food that will be available and affordable for all.

Be inspired!

  
**LUZ A. TAPOSOK**  
Officer-In-Charge / Director IV

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mor·pho·ses

The manner in which an organism or any of its parts  
changes form or undergoes development.

# TIRED HIRED TAMBAY | INVEST OUT-OF-SCHOOL YOUTH SCHOLARSHIP



A resident of Poblacion, Dumarán, Palawan, Dennis Aba graduated from the ATI's Dual Training System Program in Agriculture Entrepreneurship for Out-of-School Youth in September 2013 as part of the first batch of scholars in Palawan.



**"With persistence and perseverance, success is possible," expresses 25-year-old Dennis Aba as he recounts his farming journey.**

After finishing high school in 2007, Dennis enrolled in Palawan State University with a Bachelor's Degree in Arts. After two years in college, he was forced to leave school because of lack of finances to support his studies.

"When I left school, I became a 'tambay'. I admit that I made lots of pranks during that time," he smilingly recalls. "It came to a point that I got tired of doing the same things everyday and I realized that I want change. The timing was right as a friend told me that the Agricultural Training Institute (ATI) was offering a scholarship grant to out-of-school youth and I got interested."

### A decision to start again

Despite his apprehensions, he took the qualifying exams for the ATI Scholarship Grant in 2010. "I was informed that I qualified then I decided that this would be my new beginning," he shares. Dennis was accepted as a scholar in the Diploma in Eco-Farm Tourism and Entrepreneurship (DEFTE) for school year 2011-2013.

While in school, he realized the importance of immediately putting into practice the learnings he was gaining. "I saved part of my allowance to buy a native pig which cost P1,000. I raised it myself, applying the knowledge and techniques I gained from school and earned on my own. After four months, I sold it at P4,000," he narrates.

With the exceptional performance he showed in school, Dennis was hired as an assistant instructor and farm technician at Moulding Future Innovators (MFI) Farm Business School in Jala-Jala, Rizal in 2014. "I stayed with MFI for 10 months only because my true passion is in farming. I really wanted to be the boss of my own farm."

### Facing challenges, overcoming risks

Dennis got married in 2015 and, together with his wife, made plans to venture into farming. "We have a one-hectare farmland in Sta. Lourdes, Puerto Princesa City, Palawan. What challenged us that time was coming up with the initial capital. Good thing we were able to borrow money from a foundation. They let us borrow P50,000 and we started from there," he shares.

"Through the scholarship given to me by ATI, with all the trainings and financial support, I gained a lot of knowledge and insights on farming," he adds. "One of the most important things I learned as a scholar is that farmers feed the world. I have proven that there's money in agriculture. It increased the income of our family."

### Aiming for greater heights

When asked about his future plans, Dennis reveals, "We'd like to invest more in our farm if given the financial resources. Other than agribusiness, I want to venture into ecofarm tourism. I would like to develop this [farm] as an agri-tourism site and make it a learning site. We are planning the same with our four-hectare farm in Dumarán, Palawan."

With a burning desire to bring positive impact to young people, he encourages "Don't just dream to land a job someday. Study hard and be the one who employs people and creates jobs."

# DIGGING DEEPER, AIMING HIGHER

Fidelyn C. Agustin

John C. Maxwell once defined success as "Choosing the arena of action, determined to give yourself to that cause, which will better mankind, and last for eternity."

# THE GEM OF FBS

Honeylou G. Cababaras

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## CONQUERED CHALLENGES

It is rare for someone to base their own happiness and satisfaction from the success of others, but for Gemma Cania, or Ma'am Gem as she is fondly called, the contented smiles of her clients have been her real joy for almost 15 years of being a public servant.

Gemma has always been in love with business and agriculture for as long as she remembers. She took her tread closer to the trade she loves when she enrolled at Xavier University in Cagayan de Oro City. "Because I love agriculture, my first choice was agribusiness, then second was economics. However, both were not available at that time, so I enrolled in Bachelor of Science in Agriculture major in Animal Science."

She graduated in 1997 and landed a job as an agricultural technician in the local government unit (LGU) in Manolo Fortich, Bukidnon. She has then risen from the ranks and is presently the Municipal Agricultural Officer.

"The hardest part about working in an LGU is its politically charged environment. I was only 21 when I first experienced political discrimination," she quipped with a wry smile. But she has learned to survive and triumph.

The drive to see more happy and contented faces out of her services has been her motivation to remain in the profession she vowed to serve. When swayed by challenges, her passion for agriculture has been her strongest foundation.

"My dream is to change the agricultural landscape of Manolo Fortich, from purely production orientation to marketing and business," she said.

The municipality is one of the richest municipalities in the province of Bukidnon in terms of agricultural crop production. "Yet, many of our farmers are barely thriving," she added.

According to the National Statistic Coordination Board, despite being one of the agri-business centers in the country, Bukidnon has been classified as one of the poorest provinces in Mindanao.

"Our Mayor, who is a very successful businessman, has long been requesting us to train our farmers on record-keeping so they would know if they are gaining profit or losing," she shared.

1

## THE ANSWER

3

"Farm Business School (FBS) is heaven-sent," she muttered, smiling. She said her interest peaked when she first heard about an invitation from the Agricultural Training Institute (ATI) Regional Training Center (RTC) X on a Training on FBS. She even sacrificed her chance to finish her thesis just to join the training. "FBS is very timely. I think it is the answer to our Mayor's request. It is a training which would give us the other side of farming, the business side. It is a rare opportunity," she added.

Gemma participated in the 10-day Intensive Training of Trainers (TOT) on FBS at Veranda, Casisang, Malaybalay City, Bukidnon. She learned that FBS aims to capacitate smallholder farmers in pricing their products, identify product and volume needs in the market, value-adding, and business plan preparation.

"I could feel the excitement of bringing the modality to our farmers," she expressed. After the training, Gem immediately conducted the Season-long Farmers' Field School (FFS) Training in July 2015.

"We have oriented 50 farmers on our first day, yet only 35 participants, composed of 32 farmers and three agriculture extension workers (AEWs), persevered," she noted.

Gemma aimed that after the FFS, each of the participants would develop their own processed products based on the commodity they produced and the demands of the market.

"I made sure from the very start that those invited have potentials to go into business," she said.

"Manolo Fortich has huge potential for business. It grows various commodities such as peanut, cassava, coffee, pineapple, carrot, lettuce, and other upland-based crops," she added.

Gemma faced challenges in conducting the training. She had a problem on facilitation, especially since she lacked manpower to help her discuss topics and, at the same time, moderate the class at times when she found them difficult to organize.

"My secret is just patience and I was challenged by their interest," she shared. "I convinced them by citing examples of lives who were changed through the program. During the FFS, I keep on encouraging them that they could earn more through value-adding," she quipped.

With persistence and passion to serve, Gemma howed how challenges became manageable.

During their graduation, participants showcased their own processed products. Most of their products were developed while undergoing the FBS. She also invited officials from the LGU, national agencies, the Department of Trade and Industry, and the ATI.

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## DREAMING BIG

"We are working on having a Pasalubong Center to showcase products. This project is with the Department of Tourism, and the Manolo Fortich LGU," she informed.

The group, through Gemma's guidance, are also coming up with a development plan for the organization. This is to ensure the sustainability and continuity of the group. Gemma has also requested the ATI for the conduct of capability-building activities to strengthen organizational leadership and skills enhancement.

"We should not stop giving hope to them, in their happiness, our heart beats," she said with pride.

# LIVES TOUCHED

"My husband was skeptical at first when I joined the FBS. However, after graduation, orders of products that I have developed during the training poured in. He helped me meet the demands of the market. Now, he is very supportive of me." This was shared by Joymie Remerata, one of the graduates of the FBS. Joymie and her fellow graduates are now receiving regular orders from caterers and other food establishments in the area. They also market their products through social media. They are also planning to advertise their products at FilFarm, an e-Trading site administered by the ATI.

Gemma also created a Facebook group where they could post pictures of their products. Many received bulk orders from it.

Gemma's newly found challenge is how to sustain the productivity she nourished in the group.

"I encouraged them to first meet monthly so they could always update each other, and share new ideas," she mentioned.

Through common interest which is business, the group has successfully strengthened their bond and later decided to register at the Security Exchange Commission. The group was registered as FBS Manolo Fortich.

Shortly, the group started joining mal events where they could have a chance to display their processed products. "They also initiated developing new products, and labelling as well as packaging," she quipped with pride in her eyes.

"As of now they have spicy vinegar, sugar-coated peanut, salted peanut, peanut butter, bokayo nut, roasted peanut, turmeric tea, cassava suman, cassava cake, cassava cream milk, cassava bibingka, pichipichi, cassava roll, pineapple jam, coffee (Excelsa, Robusta, Arabica), tablea, carrot-pineapple jam, honey, bee pollen, malunggay cookies, malunggay brownies, calamansi Juice, rice puto, taro chips, papaya atchara, and sayote atchara," she added.

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# HELEN SARMIENTO: A WOMAN OF LEGACY

Glo Anne N. Darunday

1

Losing her father at a very young age made Helen Sarmiento the tough woman that she is today. Her passion and dedication to be of service to others and her patience in overcoming any obstacle that comes her way is what makes her stand out as an agricultural extension worker (AEW) in the province of Zamboanga del Sur. Helen presently holds the position of Agriculturist II at the Office of the Provincial Agriculturist in Pagadian City. She is the rural-based organization (RBO) focal person and is in charge of the search for outstanding farmer.

## Surviving a Painful Past

Born on May 21, 1952, Helen grew up in a well-off family in Tuburan, Pagadian City in the province of Zamboanga del Sur. With a rice and corn mill business that her parents owned, the family has been doing well financially for several years until one unfortunate day, the family business was robbed and cost them her father's life.

Helen, then 14 years old, recalled how life changed for the family after her father's death. Business went down and financial crisis set on to the family. Her mother could no longer afford to send them all to school after she graduated high school since there were five siblings in the family.

Determined to finish her studies, Helen went to Ozamis City and enrolled at the Immaculate Conception College. She became a working student in a relative's apartment business just so she could live and eat for free. At daytime she goes to school and from 6pm to 10pm she washed the dishes and cleaned the whole apartment. This went on until she graduated college with the course Bachelor of Science in Education major in Home Economics. She also took a master's degree in Public Administration.

2

## Starting the Journey as AEW

She was employed at then Bureau of Agricultural Extension (BAEx) back in 1973 when the municipality of Zamboanga Sibugay was still part of the province of Zamboanga del Sur. When BAEx was devolved, she entered the Office of the Provincial Agriculturist. With the utmost desire to train and impart knowledge to the farmers, over the years, Helen spent most of her time in the field interacting with farmers even if it required spending many hours on the road just to be with them.

Married with two children, juggling family life with work wasn't easy for Helen. With the demands at work requiring her to travel a lot and being away from her children even when they are sick were among the struggles she had to deal with back then. Raising them and sending them to school wasn't easy also. According to her, one time she sold 17 of her piglets just to pay the tuition of her children.

Despite all of these, she remained dedicated to her work. She said that if it wasn't for her love of work, she would've gotten easily tired in serving the farmers and would've surrendered a long time ago. But she didn't, even if there were times that she needed to travel to areas or barangays that are risky.

3

## Her Legacy

In her aim to really push through with the RBO projects, she patiently went her way to solicit, organize barangay activities, or any fund-raising activities. Until such time that she decided to set a meeting with the municipal mayors and agricultural officers (MAOs) to ask them to allot budget for the RBO projects. The meetings were a success. All of the mayors and MAOs agreed with Helen's proposal and that was a major episode for her career.

Ever since she was appointed as Rural Youth Development Officer in BAEx in 1973, she received national awards every year up to the present. Helen is really hands-on with her search for an outstanding farmer and youth. So far she had already sent 18 4H Club members to the United States of America (USA) and five in Japan for the Youth Exchange Program. She herself patiently taught and trained them for three months so they would be able to answer properly and pass the series of interviews.

One memorable 4-H member whose story really remained with Helen is Gregorio Albutra Tisoro from Barangay Camalig, Dumalinao, Zamboanga del Sur. This was Helen's first assignment municipality. Gregorio, who only finished Grade 4, approached her and asked if he could join the 4-H program because he believed that it's the only chance he can get for him to see his father abroad. Since he only finished Grade 4, Helen advised him to take an exam for him to get accelerated to high school. She helped him study in her free time hoping that he will be accelerated to high school. The hard work paid off and Gregorio got accelerated.

When he reached Luzon for the series of interviews, he tried his best to locate his relatives on his father's side in Pangasinan. He asked his relatives for the complete address of his father abroad so that he can visit him there once he will be sent to the USA. God answered their prayers, he was sent abroad and he was able to meet his father. According to Helen, Gregorio is now married and living happily with his family abroad.

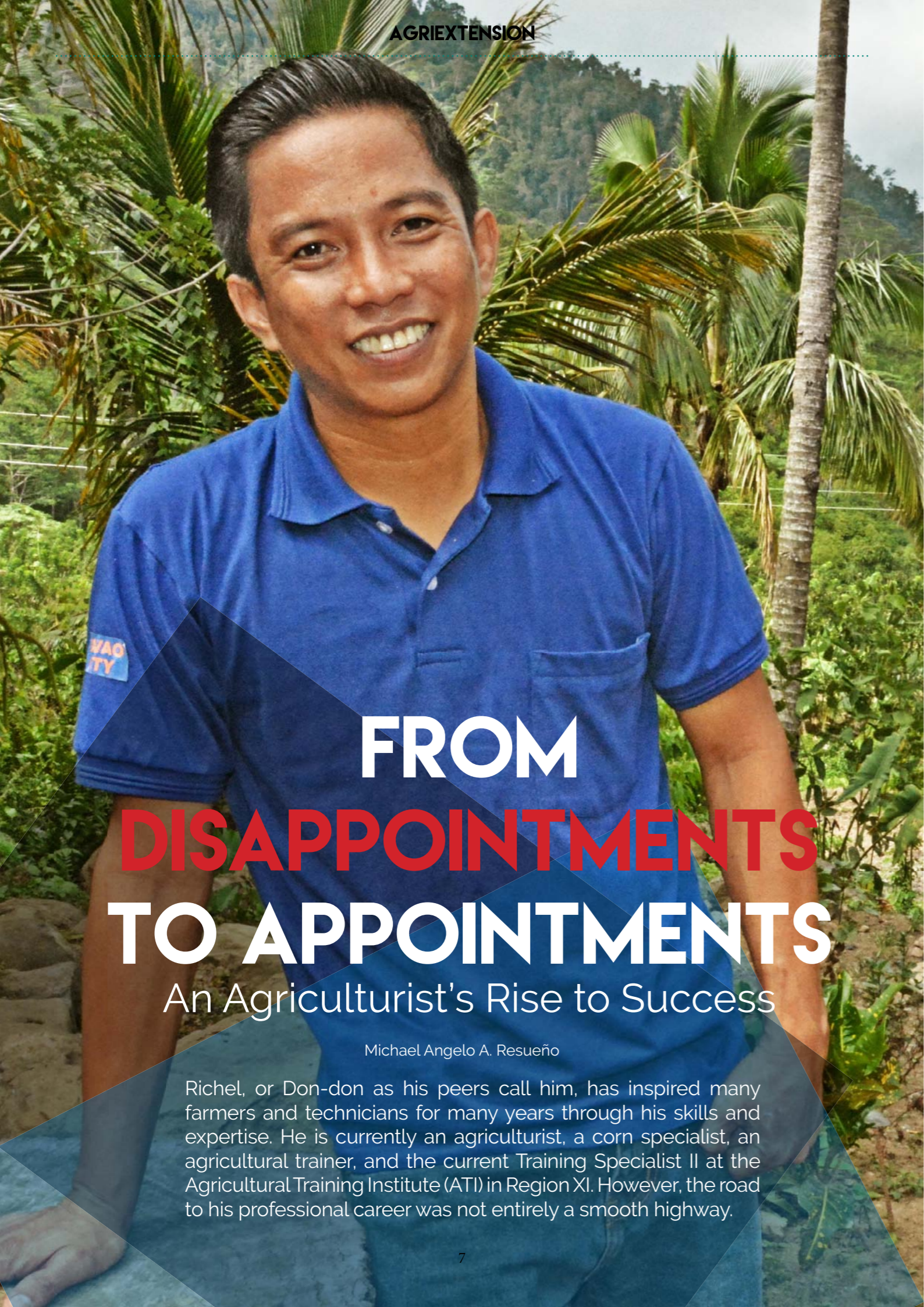
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## Living a Simple Dream

Retiring in two years' time, Helen has this motherly advice to all extension workers; "Be humble, prayerful, work hard, and do your job with love and honesty." She has the simplest dream in life, it is to live a happy and comfortable life with her family. Her main goal is to become a role model to everyone she comes in contact with and be a good example to other AEWs.







# FROM DISAPPOINTMENTS TO APPOINTMENTS

## An Agriculturist's Rise to Success

Michael Angelo A. Resueño

Richel, or Don-don as his peers call him, has inspired many farmers and technicians for many years through his skills and expertise. He is currently an agriculturist, a corn specialist, an agricultural trainer, and the current Training Specialist II at the Agricultural Training Institute (ATI) in Region XI. However, the road to his professional career was not entirely a smooth highway.

### HUMBLE BEGINNINGS

Richel was raised by a simple family at Bunawan Aplaya, Davao City. His father was a mechanic, while his mother was a plain housewife. As the eldest son of three children, he toiled day and night to finish high school.

"Grabe jud namo ka pobre sa una. Nakapangita jud ko ug trabahoon para makahuman lang jud ko ug eskwela (We were extremely poor. I tried looking for work just to finish high school)," he said while gazing at a far distance.

At an early age of 13, Richel ventured to any kind of job he could get. He worked as a construction laborer, sold barbecues in their locality, and a mat vendor. "Mo bangon gyud ko ug alas singko sa kadlawon kada adlaw para makasugod ug pamaligya," he proudly said. It was certainly a hard-knock life. (I had to wake up at five in the morning everyday to start selling.)

In 1995, he finished his secondary education with a desire to pursue AB English. Sadly, due to financial constraints, he had to stop.

### FAVOR IN BOHOL

Discouraged, he decided to go to Bohol to assist in his aunt's general merchandising business—leaving the opportunity of tertiary education to his siblings.

While in Bohol at the age of 16, Richel saved hundred percent of his weekly salary worth P150.00. He also joined dance groups to perform in several competitions and other engagements for additional allowances and savings.

Months later, Richel's determination to get a degree in college triggered when he met the Barnabites Fathers, a group of missionary catholic priests who were looking for seminarian scholars for St. Paul's Academy. Richel passed the entrance exam and was invited to meet the priests in Davao.

In March 1996, Richel went back to Davao City expecting to meet the Barnabites Fathers again. He exclaimed, "Ni uli ko ug Davao kay too nako nga makigkita sila sa ako pero wala man sila nisipot." (I went home to Davao thinking that (Barnabites Fathers) would meet me but they didn't show up.)

"Dili basta-basta akong gi agi-an. Maong akong tema sa kinabuhi kay, 'Poverty is not a hindrance to success.' It never stopped me." (I have been through an uneasy life. That's what my life's theme is, 'Poverty is not a hindrance to success.')

### DISAPPOINTMENTS TO OPPORTUNITIES

Later on, Richel met a relative who worked at the University of Mindanao (UM)-Campus Ministry. He encouraged him to enroll for a Diploma in Agricultural Technology at Mt. Apo Science Foundation College. To his delight, Richel went back to Bohol to withdraw all his savings for his study.

Albeit his withdrawn savings, he was still in need of a sponsor. He expressed, "Naay ni suporta sa ako pero kadali lang man to." (Someone sponsored my fees but it didn't last long.) The head of the foundation promised to look for someone to support his studies. One day, somebody by the name of Saturnino Petalcorin pledged to sponsor him until his graduation. Petalcorin was the Executive Vice President of the University that time.

Two years later, Richel received his Diploma for Agricultural Technology. Aside from that, he received a Loyalty Award and Most Outstanding Project Manager in the Piggery Department. Petalcorin was so proud of his achievements that he offered Richel two options—a job opportunity or a chance to pursue a Bachelor's Degree in Agricultural Technology at the University of Southeastern Philippines (USEP). Consequently, Richel chose the latter. And in return, he offered his services as Petalcorin's mango farm consultant at Tres de Mayo, Sto. Rosario, Davao City.

Richel was very keen on finishing his bachelor's degree while working at his sponsor's farm. In March 2000, he graduated as cum laude from the University.

### A STEP TO GOVERNMENT SERVICE

Like any other fresh graduate, Richel was job searching. Then, he met a friendly couple in his cousin's funeral. He learned that the couple were both government employees. When they realized Richel was looking for a job, they recommended him to apply at the local government unit of Davao. In less than a month, he complied all the requirements and was scheduled for an interview.

In December 2000, Richel was appointed as an Agricultural Technologist in the Local Government of Davao City. He was assigned at the outskirts of Paquibato District. There, he strived to improve the commodities in Paquibato District. One of his notable accomplishments was when he facilitated the 1st Corn Harvest Festival, in partnership with several private companies, in 2003. On the other hand, he helped hybridize a 100-hectare corn field at Barangay Sumimao, Paquibato District, under the Quedancor Credit Institution.

Despite his professional career in the government, he has never forgotten the foundation that molded him. Richel returned to Mt. Apo Science Foundation College to sponsor students who cannot afford their fees. Later on, he helped three scholars finish studies. Also, Richel and his wife traditionally purchase school supplies every December for selected day care students in Paquibato District.

Due to his dedication towards agricultural extension, Richel was accepted as an Expanded Human Resource Development Program Scholar of the ATI in 2010. With this, he took a Masters Degree on Extension Education at USEP, Tagum City, Davao del Norte and graduated on time.

In 2014, Richel became a recipient of the 2nd Quality Corn Achievers Awards as an Outstanding Agricultural Extension Worker under the Corn Program during the 10th Philippine Corn Congress in Cagayan de Oro.

In January 2016, Richel was accepted at the ATI Region XI as a Training Specialist and, at the same time, a focal person on Agriculture and Fishery Mechanization and an alternate focal person for Corn.



1 As a newbie at the Agricultural Training Institute (ATI), what I care the most is my compensation. Just like my other previous job, I expected to do a repeated boring routine. Working eight hours a day, repeatedly doing my task and interacting with my laptop are what I do most of the day. However, since I have to do my job, I must enjoy and learn how to love my job.

Jerwin C. Resuello

# WONDERFUL JOB



## A CLIENT'S VOICE

3 "I am thankful to ATI for choosing me to be one of the participants of this activity. I learned so many things. Not only in the lectures but most importantly from my fellow participants who share their experiences. That is why I sincerely listen to every sharing of my fellow participants, because with it, I learned so many lessons. At first, I don't really have experience in farming. This activity is a big help to me as a beginner in farming, I can apply all the learnings when I go back to my place. I can also share these learnings to my fellow women farmers in my community. Thank you so much to all the acquaintances and camaraderie and friendship formed in this activity. ATI, thank you so much."

-Aiden Albat  
Registered Nurse

2 When your work changes the life of others, then you have a wonderful job.

My journey in ATI happened when I randomly clicked a certain link on the Internet which led me to the Institute's website. Out of my curiosity, I sent an application letter telling them that I am interested in one of the vacant positions. Since then, the ATI reached out and I successfully entered the institution as a permanent employee. As a newbie, I thought my assigned task would be boring since I will be dealing with the training reports from the Regional Training Centers (RTCs). Monitoring and encoding all the reports into a single database were my daily routine in the office. How this could be so relevant to the ATI? I asked myself. I couldn't see any importance with my work.

My doubt led me to review the reports I've compiled. I scanned the database and read the impressions of the farmers and other participants from the different trainings conducted by the ATI and its network of training centers. A certain impression caught my eye. "The ultimate test of man's conscience maybe his willingness to sacrifice something today for future generations." As a public servant how I can contribute to society? Then I realized that most of the impressions I read are all positive and the ATI was much appreciated by conducting those trainings. The answer to my question was my contribution in helping to identify what will be the trainings and programs that will be of great help to our clients. The ATI solely focused on reaching out, building dreams and changing lives indeed and I will be part and definitely commit to its ideals.

To love and enjoy what you are destined to do in life is one of the greatest achievements. I may still be a newbie in ATI but I will use the opportunity to grow and contribute to our society. The more "thank you ATI" that I read in the training reports and impressions of participants, the more I feel fulfilled and realize that I have a wonderful job. I may not be in the field and closely interact with our clients but I serve as a bridge as I consolidate all these reports and impressions so that others may be inspired. Just like its effect on me. Someone asked if I will stay long in ATI. I pondered and definitely say "Yes, I will," as I want to be part of an institution that reaches out, builds dreams and changes lives.



**SUCCESS FROM BELOW:**

# Stories Worth Telling

Sherwin C. Tapalla



“Let our goal be the success of telling stories from below.”

1

“All men (and women) seek one goal, success or happiness. The only way to achieve true success is to express yourself completely in service to society. First, have a definite, clear, practical ideal—a goal, an objective. Second, have the necessary means to achieve your ends—wisdom, money, materials, and methods. Third, adjust all your means to that end.” – Aristotle

2

The least I could think of is to ensure delivery of our quality extension services in agriculture and fisheries.

## The Question?

If Aristotle can simply describe success, common men, like me, find it hard to do so. I would not even dare own such a word, yet using Aristotle's definition. More than that, I could not even admit that I fully understand what he meant with the phrase, "...to express yourself completely in service to society." What I could rather do is to derive some meaning from it and give credit to those whom I believe has shown and realized it – one way or another.

If, for instance, complete service to society means having great contribution in terms of technology, knowledge, fame, wealth, and power, then certainly there's a lot of success stories to tell. In fact, we mostly see them on television, hear them on the radio, read about them in newspaper and magazine, and talk of them at school or office seminars. Say for example, Manny Pacquiao, Lucio Tan, the Marcoses, and others.

It makes me wonder though, "If the popular characters behind these so-called success stories have really expressed themselves completely in service to our society, how come there are still uneducated, unheard, poor, and defenseless people in our society?" What service have they done in complete expression, or appreciation, of our society? Is there even such a thing called complete service in society? For this reason, I borrow what Socrates said, "An unexamined life is not worth living" as a guiding principle. These questions led me to re-examine the deeper meaning of the word "complete".

According to Merriam-Webster Dictionary, the word "complete" is an adjective which means (1) having all necessary parts, (2) not lacking anything, (3) not limited in any way, (4) not requiring more work, and (5) entirely done or completed. In other words, the word "complete" means an end, a goal, an objective. And so, who among in our society has achieved their goal or objective?

## The Realization

Many among us have contributed their fair share of service in our society. Remarkably, only a few has achieved the end—their goal, their objective. Most of us still continuously search for the lacking parts we need to end our work. Sadly, the few ones who achieved their end are not given their equal or due recognition. Worst of all, they endlessly live in meager state despite of their vital contribution. These nameless and unheard few are our local farmers and fishers.

Our local farmers and fishers are the ones who have effectively, and repetitively, achieved their end whenever we buy, process, and consume their different produce. Given the various challenges and misfortunes they are facing every now and then, their tireless efforts never cease to bring about the fruits of their labor—the foods in our table. Their definite, clear, and practical ideal of securing that farm products are readily available is their very own contribution to our society's clamor for food security and self-sufficiency.

Unfortunately, the necessary means that are extremely important to achieve their goal are equally insufficient, if not at all inexistent. Oftentimes, government support services and interventions intended for and directed to assist, and hopefully alleviate, them from their dire state never reach their hands as these go directly to the pockets of some crooked politicians and their civilian cohorts. Coupled with other stringent government credit and/or irrigation mechanisms, these contribute to the continued struggle of our local farmers and fishers. But despite these odds, they relentlessly persevere to adjust

their own means, however little they may have, to meet the end of producing foods so that their families—and our families—will have something to eat.

Regardless of their true successes, we, the many and the underachiever contributor in our society, frequently fail to give them their rewards even in simple ways such as providing for their needed knowledge, funds, materials, and technologies. Some of us even fail them by not sharing our knowledge and technologies or by limiting and delaying their badly needed assistance and interventions. At times, we even subscribe them to our hidden agenda before we reach out to them.

I strongly believe that they, our local farmers and fishers who have repeatedly met their end in complete expression of service to our society, are the ones whose stories are worth telling, and not our national or local leaders. Moreover, they are the ones whom we really owe our lives after we were born. Truly, without them, no great nation will ever survive.

What can we do then for our nation's champion contributors? How can we show our appreciation of their priceless contribution to our society? The least I could think of is to ensure delivery of our quality extension services in agriculture and fisheries. And let their stories, be heard. As Aristotle once said, "All men (and women) seek one goal, success or happiness..." I dare say, "Let our goal be the success of telling stories from below." Let's reach out to our local farmers and fishers to recreate their once small dreams in the hope of transforming others' lives.

# A REWARDING ATI EXPERIENCE

Kim Maverick C. Narvaez

“Local government units (LGUs) have the lowest intellectual quotient when it comes to planning.”

This was the statement of Demecia Luces, a local extension worker from the Office of the Provincial Agriculturist in Abra. This was one of the many stereotypes they received from other stakeholders with regard to their skills in planning, particularly in agriculture and fisheries extension. However, with the constant capability-building and consultation activities conducted by the Agricultural Training Institute (ATI), she is proud to say that their planning skills are now honed and they can be one step away from being type casted.

With this impression from Luces, I could not help but compare my early stages in the ATI and how it changed my perspective and mindset when it comes to development work. In the first place, I never imagined that I will be working in the government but I remember back in elementary and high school that we were trained to be servant leaders. In college, we were taught to uphold honor and excellence. Deep inside, there was a calling for this profession.

As I was starting my career as a Planning Officer in ATI, I had my fair share of experiences that pushed me to grow and tap into my various skills that was unseen years ago. My skills in training management, facilitation, public speaking, video editing, and technical writing were developed after gaining so much experiences from the tasks that were assigned to me. I only wanted to be a good follower. Leading big assignments never crossed my mind.

The first challenge came along. In 2015, I was among the Policy and Planning Division's staff in-charge in the development of the Philippine Agriculture and Fisheries Extension Strategic Plan for the next six years (2017-2022). It was overwhelming because it was the first time that I was going to be involved in a huge task like this.

The strategic planning process was tedious and it involved many activities—from training of trainers, consultation workshops, and expert's review to the actual crafting of the document. Likewise, with all the pressure of not having a background in strategic planning. However, I realized that this is the mandate of our organization. It was an important task because this would set the direction of extension in the coming years. Preparation is indeed important.

“I am glad to be part of ATI in influencing these extension stakeholders on what needs to be addressed at the present and the future”.

As our Division went through the strategic planning process, all the worries, doubts and fears were finally gone. These were changed into a feeling of gratefulness and fulfillment after hearing the impressions coming from the participants of various extension stakeholders such as LGUs, state universities and colleges, national government agencies and the private sector.

As Engr. Ana Fe Molato of the Marinduque State College said, “Currently, our university contributes minimal in providing agriculture and fisheries extension but because of this activity we should start focusing our attention to this as I am now aware of the current needs of our clients.” It was a confirmation that we are on the right track. Further, I am glad to be part of the ATI in influencing these extension stakeholders on what needs to be addressed at the present and the future.

All of our efforts are paying off. After weeks and some sleepless nights of consolidation, analysis, writing, and revisions, the document was finally launched during the ATI's 29th anniversary in January 2016. It was an inspiring and proud moment for me seeing the faces of confirmation from the people present during the launching.

However, it does not stop here. I am now assigned to lead in the operationalization of the agriculture and fisheries extension strategic plan. With this renewed inspiration from our stakeholders such as Luces and Molato and all the individuals who were part in the development of the strategic plan, I shall do my best to continue what we have started.





Being a farmer herself, she really walks the talk. All the things she learned in trainings were applied in her farm for farmers to see and experience.

# A Nurse Wanna-Be turned Outstanding Extension Worker

Chared D. Ladera

"If it's meant to be, it will be." Who would have thought that the person who had wanted to be a nurse someday would end up being an agricultural extension worker and will be awarded as Rice and Corn Achiever for two consecutive years.

A 62-year-old extensionist, Neri Frigillano, or fondly called as "Nene" by her family and friends, has been working for 42 years as agricultural extension worker (AEW) in the Local Government of Mahayag, Zamboanga del Sur. She is handling corn, rice, high value crops, and others while currently covering four barangays namely, Poblacion, Tumapic, Delusom, and Balanan.

## The beginnings that tailored her destiny

In her younger days, she dreamt of being a nurse who would take care of her sick fellowmen. But her parents wanted her to study agriculture. Without the approval of her parents, she had no choice but to pursue agriculture even if she had no passion or love for agriculture. She still became a student majoring agronomy.

"I even cried in the middle of our gardening because I can't manage to work on my own plot, but, fortunately, I had few helpful classmates who were willing to work with me in my plot and I was able to do it. That time, little by little my passion in agriculture started," she narrated.

Despite all the struggles she encountered during her college days, she was able to finish her degree. In 1974, she got the degree of Bachelor of Science in Agriculture major in Agronomy in Zamboanga del Norte Agricultural College (ZNAC), Tampilisan, Zamboanga del Norte. Right after graduation in 1974, she started her career as Corn Technician in the Bureau of Agricultural Extension (BAEx), now the Agricultural Training Institute (ATI), she was transferred to the local government unit as Agricultural Technologist in 1995.

## What made you stay?

"There was a time when half of my batch in my work place decided to resign because they didn't like the job anymore, but, unbelievably, I was one of the people who stayed and continued the journey." She explained how she enjoyed the work of being an agricultural technician, how she enjoyed going to farms and fields, and how she enjoyed experiencing the lives of the farmers. "While I'm sharing something to them, I'm also learning many things from them. It's a win-win situation."

## What's unique in being an AEW compared to other professions?

As an AEW, she claimed that work is very enjoyable even if it is very exhausting and very tiring. She got to go and enjoy visiting farms, talking to farmers and appreciating life more. "Compared to other professions that is only situated in the four corners of a room and they only see a limited view of life whereas being an extensionist, I could see a wilder and bigger horizon every time I visited farms and fields. I can appreciate all the things I see and feel the fresh mountain breeze."

She added, "The scorching heat of the sun does not matter because in my heart the love of agriculture and farmers is there and the happiness and satisfaction is overflowing. There's a saying that goes 'people in agriculture age less because of the exposure.'"

## How to be an outstanding AEW?

Her two national awards were the 2014 Agri Pinoy Rice Achiever Awards for Agricultural Extension Workers and the National Quality Corn Achievers Awards in 2015. She said that these awards were fruits of her efforts of always trying and never quitting. "I never stopped my ambitions while I'm still alive. I believe that if it's for you, it will be given to you."

She added that for a person to be successful, one must need to be hard working. One must not count everything that he does, it must be heartily given. Don't count the time, money and effort that were rendered because of work.

The spiritual guidance she does by praying every day and offering everything to the Lord helped her to face every struggle and work-related challenges given to her.

## It was destiny

"The choice to be an AEW, I never regret that." She said that at first she might have thought that she was not sure, but with perseverance and hard work, she surely reaped the feeling of enjoyment and contentment of what she has now. "All struggles will be paid off," she added.

As realization, she claimed that even if she did not become a nurse, she still helped her fellow countrymen, not only the sick ones but every citizen of Mahayag, because being an AEW helps every farmer in producing food for the people.

# THE PRICE OF SUCCESS

Charity Gay H. Guba

He was determined to achieve something. He believed that the price of success is persevering tirelessly. He was right.

After his training and internship at the Agricultural Training Institute-Regional Training Center I (ATI-RTC I), Ajea Cansino Alcantara, a Development Communication (DevComm) student from Rosales, Pangasinan, was awarded the Best Intern at the Central Luzon State University (CLSU) last February 11, 2016. He was also recognized with the Best in Case Study for his case report entitled "The Department of Agriculture's e-Learning Program: The Case of Agricultural Training Institute-Regional Training Center in Region I, Sta. Barbara, Pangasinan, Philippines."

Being the eldest child in the family, Ajea had a hard-knock life. He got to experience 'no baon, no pamasaha' while schooling. He says, "I was born and raised without luxury."

During his elementary years, he was an honor student from Grades 1 to 6. "My elementary

school days were happy especially when I was in Grade 6 because I was awarded as Athlete of the Year when I competed at Palarong Pambansa as a member of the team of Basketball elementary boys of Region I," he recalls.

However, on January 4, 2008, Ajea's life changed. He suffered an injury while playing basketball and had to undergo a series of surgeries. He elaborates, "The operations were successful and I did recover, but the marks of the pain will last forever. I stopped playing basketball since then."

After the incident and when he reached high school, Ajea was removed from the star section. He felt his world fall apart, but he continued to have faith in himself—determined to work hard in order to succeed. His hardships paid off as he graduated third honors in his class.

Ajea strived even harder in college. He studied Bachelor of Arts in Development Communication at CLSU in Nueva Ecija. However, college life wasn't easy. He believed it was survival of the fittest. He experienced many ups and downs, but he shares, "During those times, I developed my confidence. I was braver and stronger. I became a leader."

Before graduation, Ajea became an on-the-job trainee (OJT) at ATI-RTC I. He was assigned at the Information Service Section (ISS) under the direct supervision of its chief, Maricel Dacapias.

Ajea had difficulty in coping up with his new environment and workplace at the beginning of his internship. Nevertheless, as time went by, he blended in with the Institute's culture and established good working relationship with his colleagues. With diligence and dedication, he was able to fully understand and perform the functions of the ISS.

As an intern, Ajea co-anchored the School-on-the-Air (SOA) on Sustainable Rice Production at DZRD Radio Sunshine Dagupan. He became a voice-over talent for Palayamanan in San Emilio, Ilocos Sur. He also published six articles for the ATI website.

Moreover, he designed pamphlets and tarpaulins for the Institute. Ajea remembers Dacapias saying, "The most important thing you have to keep in mind is not just that you've finished your tasks but that you have served the public as well. Nothing is difficult if you are dedicated and you are enjoying what you do and, most importantly, you are able to share your knowledge." Ajea realized that working is about commitment and dedication. He says, "I was encouraged to be grittier in pursuing my goals in life."

Ajea completed his 400-hour internship at ATI-RTC I and finished his final requirements for graduation. In class, he successfully presented his case study entitled "The Department of Agriculture's e-Learning Program: The Case of Agricultural Training Institute-Regional Training Center in Region I, Sta. Barbara, Pangasinan, Philippines".

His 50-page case report describes the ATI's e-Learning program, which can be adopted by academic organizations to support the usual classroom teaching-learning process as a supplementary course to its curricular program and can provide awareness on the trend of information dissemination using internet-based education. Eventually, Ajea's outputs and experiences at ATI-RTC I rewarded him the Best in Internship and the Best in Case Study awards among all DevComm students in his university.

Ajea graduated last February 12, 2016. After nine days, he was employed at ATI-RTC I on Job Order (JO) status. He now works at the Planning, Policy, Monitoring and Evaluation Section, and facilitates various administrative, planning, and training programs of the Institute.

"Being an OJT and now a JO is indeed a wonderful blessing from God," Ajea candidly says.



Extension service is not about money.  
It's about working and helping others  
to achieve their success.  
Recognition is just a bonus."

This is the statement of John Belamide, an agricultural extension worker (AEW) in Sablayan, Occidental Mindoro and 2014 National Winner for Agri-Pinoy Rice Achiever's Award in AEW category.



With his numerous accomplishments, he was again chosen as the Regional Agri-Pinoy Rice Achiever's Awardee for AEW in 2014 along with his assisted farmer in the Gawad Saka Award for Rice. At last, he was then recognized in the national level when he won the 2014 Agri-Pinoy Rice Achievers' Award as an Outstanding AEW. The recognition inspired him to level up his effort as an AEW.

"John is diligent in his work and he knows how to get along with people especially with farmers. He deserves to receive various awards," Evelyn Cabalbag, Agriculturist II and his immediate supervisor, shares.

### Working Beyond His Job

Today, one of John's advocacies is to help the youth who are interested and have the passion in farming to enroll in agriculture-related courses. He constantly seeks for funding institutions to grant scholarships for deserving youths. Though, it is not part of his job, he believes that there are lots of youth who have potentials to develop further the agriculture industry.

"People think that if you are in the agriculture industry, your job is just to farm and simply produce food. Little did they know that we, in the agriculture sector, have the greatest contribution in the economy of our country," John proudly declares.

### Moving Forward

John excitedly shared that the geo-resistivity survey project that he has been working, in collaboration with the Bureau of Soils and Water Management, was a big success. The Sablayanos, particularly in Sablayan South, have already started planting for the second cropping season of 2016 since they have now sufficient supply of water as a result of the project.

At present, John is handling projects such as Rice Crop Manager, Participatory Variety Selection Green Super Rice, Participatory Variety Selection of Next Generation Rice, PRISM, and Geotagging.

With John's achievements, he proves that everyone can touch other's lives and make a difference even in a little way.

"For me, being an AEW is a very noble and satisfying profession. Yes, our salary is not high, sometimes our personal money is used just to deliver quality extension services to our clients but the feeling that you can help and change people's lives is fulfilling and rewarding," John humbly expresses.

### Humble Beginning

John was employed in the Municipal Agricultural Office of Sablayan in 2002 as a Report Officer under the High Value Crops Development Program (HVCDP). He was later designated as HVCDP Focal Person from 2009 to 2012. When the Agricultural Training Institute (ATI) Regional Training Center MIMAROPA conducted a four-month Season-Long Training of Trainers on Integrated Pest Management on Vegetable Production in 2012, he was one of the participants. John said that during the training, he learned a lot—from the technical aspects to extension delivery system and facilitation.

"I thought, as long as you are an expert in your field of specialization, it's enough. However, during our Season Long [training], that was the time I realized that aside from technical expertise, extension delivery system is equally important in my work because it's how you deal with people to disseminate information and transfer technologies," John narrates.

After the training, he was more inclined and inspired to serve his community. Among his target participants were Mangyan communities and prisoners from the Sablayan Prison and Penal Farm. Aside from providing technical assistance, he also served as resource speaker and facilitator in various commodities.

"I opt to help them out because they are the ones who needed the reformation and programs the most," he justifies.

According to him, at first, he had a hard time delivering the extension services in his area of assignment due to lack of resources. As much as he wanted to serve, he cannot do so because of insufficient support from the local government unit. Hence, to sustain his projects with his beneficiaries, he approached some government agencies and non-government organizations for support and financial assistance.

### Recognizing His Efforts

With his accomplishments, he won the Regional Achiever's Award in AEW Category and was nominated for the National Achiever's Award, but, unfortunately, did not win.

The said failure did not discourage him but challenged and refueled his desire to exert more efforts to serve their clients. He prepared and submitted proposals to the Department of Agriculture Regional Field Office MIMAROPA and other funding agencies which were fortunately approved and funded. Among his initiated proposals which were funded and implemented were the provisions of various farm machineries, circulating dryer, farm-to-market road, and rice mill for farmers which greatly help his constituents. He was able to push the establishment of tramlines for the Mangyan farmers to easily transport their products from upland to lowland areas. He also strengthened rural-based organizations (RBOs) in their barangays, organized more farmers' associations and conducted several Farmers' Field Schools (FFSs). John said that one of the reasons why his FFSs were successfully implemented was because of his motivation to the participants.

"I always tell them that if they want to give brighter future to their family, they have to apply the technologies they have learned from the FFS and invest their yields for their children's education," he states with conviction.

Moreover, John, as an AEW, has become a constant partner of ATI MIMAROPA in conducting trainings and other related activities in the municipality of Sablayan. During the School-on-the-Air (SOA) on Organic Agriculture conducted by ATI MIMAROPA last 2014, John was one of the active coordinators who had the highest number of graduates in the program. He also initiated the inclusion of inmates of Sablayan Prison and Penal Farm in the SOA which opened the way for various rehabilitation programs for inmates coming from different government agencies.

# John Belamide:

## Small Acts Beget Extraordinary Achievement

Jezell dT. dela Cruz



# Real courage breeds success

Erlan D. Pasana

Nanette Rosales came from a poor family. She would not have been able to finish her studies if she did not pass the scholarship from the Coconut Producers Federation (COCOFED), Inc. She experienced a lot of difficulties that somehow discouraged her to pursue her studies. But, as a woman with strong faith, Nanette finished her Bachelor's degree in Agriculture from Luzonian University Foundation in Lucena City, Quezon.



"Success is not about how much you've learned, but in never stopping to learn," she started.

Nanette Rosales came from a poor family. She would not have been able to finish her studies if she did not pass the scholarship from COCOFED, Inc. She experienced a lot of difficulties that somehow discouraged her to pursue her studies. But, as a woman with strong faith, Nanette finished her bachelor's degree in Agriculture from Luzonian University Foundation in Lucena City, Quezon.

Having earned her bachelor's degree, she started working at the Department of Agriculture (DA) Oriental Mindoro Agricultural Experiment Station as casual employee in 1983. After six months, with her dedication and excellent job performance, she was then promoted as livestock inspector on permanent basis.

"God poured out His blessings to me. He created perfect opportunities for my career growth. I worked as livestock inspector for three years. Through hard work, I then became an Agriculture and Food Technologist. With the new responsibility, I was more inspired to make a difference in the lives of others," Nanette narrated.

With a heart for farmers, she put her life-long knowledge, as well as new skills she learned through trainings and consultations with experts, to help them uplift their lives. Together with her co-workers, they went to the field just to cater to the needs of their clientele.

With every turn of a page of her career, each day presented new challenges to her. Nanette remembered a well-known Biblical verse in Luke 12:48 "From everyone who has given much, much will be demanded; and from one who has been entrusted with much, much will be asked." The verse inspired her to go back to school. She said that her knowledge on her chosen field was not enough to teach a wider scope of farmers. "I needed to study to be updated on the latest technologies on farming," Nanette claimed.

In 1992, without any doubt and at her own expense, she took up her Master's Degree in Agriculture at Pampanga Agricultural College. Though she experienced difficulties in balancing her time for work, family, and

schooling, she still succeeded and earned her Master's degree Major in Crop Science in 1994.

As an employee who possesses eagerness for work, coupled with her newly gained learning and years of experience in agriculture, she was promoted as Agriculturist II in 1994. However, her achievements never stopped her to discover more innovations pushing her to indulge in research.

As a researcher, she received several awards, both in the regional and national levels, for her exemplary performance. She won second place for the Best Research Paper Award, Farming Systems Category for her paper entitled "TPR-TPR + Duck Farming Systems" on May 27, 1994. She ranked third place for her paper on Rice (inorganic fertilizer + Azolla) + duck on June 3, 1997 and bagged third place for her research on Rice Cropping Pattern Using a Combination of Inorganic Fertilizer and Azolla + Ducks on August 7, 1997.

Nanette, having a steady mindset for learning, actively participated in several trainings of different government and non-government agencies to acquire new information and hone her skills in agriculture. "It also pays to invest in additional knowledge, which is why I regularly attend trainings and seminars provided by the Agricultural Training Institute (ATI)," Nanette said.

In 2004, Nanette took a big leap in her career. She was promoted to Senior Agriculturist and was then transferred at the DA Agricultural Demonstration Center. Her eagerness to expand her horizon was limitless.

Determined in creating a more solid path for her future, Nanette applied for and qualified for the Expanded Human Resource Development Program (EHRDP) Scholarship offered by the DA through the ATI. The scholarship provided for her tuition fee and book allowance every semester, monthly operational allowance, and thesis assistance until she finished her doctoral degree.

However, her life was not that easy. As an employee, a wife, and a mother of four children, studying was a challenge to her that she had to spend her whole weekend for her schooling.

Nanette expressed that the time that she spent with her children didn't do much. Since she also worked on weekdays, she often arrived home late with her children already asleep. She added that when her relatives

and friends invited her for special occasions like weddings, christening, and birthday celebrations, she wouldn't have the time to attend.

Despite this, she was very thankful for her husband, Ramon, for being supportive of her studies. To make up for the time she could not give her children, Ramon took care of them. He attended to all their needs and gradually taught their children to be independent. "The little amount of time I spent with my children, husband, relatives, and friends did not matter, because I knew that, someday, it will pay off," Nanette stated.

Nanette used the allowance she received from the scholarship wisely. With her savings, she was able to give her children school allowance. There was a point that she had to sacrifice her one-month allowance just to buy a second hand owner-type jeepney for emergency use of her sick mother-in-law. "The jeep, worth P40,000, was big help for the medical needs of my mother-in-law. Every time she needed a check-up or had to go in for emergencies, we could immediately bring her to the hospital," she explained.

"Despite the hardships, I am exerting much effort to prepare myself academically because I believe that all these preparations and hard-earned years of service will hone me to further serve my countrymen," Nanette declared. Eventually, her sacrifices paid off in 2015 when she added another title to her resume as she received her Doctor's degree in Philosophy in Agriculture Major in Crop Science from Mindoro State College Agriculture and Technology.

Now, at the age of 56, she has finally reached the pinnacle of her career. She is now the Chief Agriculturist at the Regional Integrated Agricultural Research Center, also known as Regional Crop Protection Center in DA MIMAROPA.

Nanette is indeed grateful to the ATI for having the EHRDP which gave financial support to individuals who want to enrich their lives by improving their professional skills. As part of giving back to the ATI, she is offering her expertise as a resource person in several trainings of the agency, free of charge most of the time.

Nanette is a proof that hard work and perseverance will really open doors you never even knew existed.



# The Seaweed Livelihood in Ropes

Jereme Jon M. Dumaraos

Jerlinda Cruz, an agricultural extension worker from the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources–Regional Fisheries Training Center (BFAR-RFTC) V, is a recipient of the Human Resource Development Program in the ATI. In her study for the program, observed issues of poverty, unemployment, and malnutrition in coastal communities like Barangay Bolo in Tiwi, Albay which seems a never-ending problem.

**Jerlinda Cruz**, an agricultural extension worker from Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources – Regional Fisheries Training Center (BFAR-RFTC) V, observed issues of poverty, unemployment, and malnutrition in coastal communities like Barangay Bolo in Tiwi, Albay which seems a never-ending problem. Nonetheless, she strongly believed that such problems can only be solved one step at a time. She is one of the many resource speakers who conduct training on livelihood for people in coastline communities to alleviate their lives step by step.

However, for each step she took to help people is another problem encountered. Livelihood such as seaweed- farming, which provides an alternative livelihood and source of income for fishers, were destroyed by typhoons. Many believed that such livelihood is impractical if it will be built only to be destroyed by a typhoon every year.

Typhoons like Ruby that hit Albay in 2014 incurred P90.46 million worth of damages to agriculture and fisheries. In 2015, typhoon Nona also caused damages to infrastructures and road debris. As such, coastline communities have a hard time developing sustainable livelihood for their families and relied too much on fishing which results in the rapid depletion of aquatic resources which further results in low income for their families.

Even if she would seem to encounter more problems than solutions in each step or a storm stronger than any boat can handle, Jerlinda didn't give up.

## A Rope to Withstand the Strongest Storm

To address the problem, BFAR-RFTC V promoted the Modified Floating Rope Method (MFRM)—a method where seaweeds are attached to ropes forming like a floating farm lot in the middle of the sea. The said method is seen to help seaweed withstand strong typhoons since it can be easily submerged.

Jerlinda evaluated the performance of the MFRM compared to the usual methods of seaweed farming. Seaweeds farmed using the MFRM had a survival rate of 88.33% which also withstood typhoon Yolanda (international codename Haiyan) which caused thousands of human casualties and millions of damages to infrastructure.

The construction materials used in the MFRM are composed of cheap materials like ropes to which the seaweeds will be attached and sacks which serve as an anchor for the foundation. Furthermore, the said method can be easily expanded into large-scale farming as the construction materials are cheap and the design is flexible.

## The Rainbow after the Storm

Now, the fishers in Baragay Bolo are preparing the seaweed propagules for the next planting season. The harvested seaweeds are not only being harvested and sold into the public market and buyers as they are also being made as seaweed pansit and even seaweed pizza, thus extending the lifetime of seaweeds. This way, they can still earn some income even when there are typhoons or on seasons when they aren't able to plant seaweeds.

Tiwi is also known for its geothermal facilities and pilgrimage area which the Department of Labor and Employment and Department of Trade and Industry are using as an opportunity to be able to construct a building dedicated to showcase the products of the local fishers and investors seeking potential business in the barangay.

# Find Your Heart, Dream Big, and Stay Inspired

Adrian Chris P. Velasco

It is said that inspirations in life are found by looking at what is ahead of us, but this humble man found his inspiration by looking back. Today, Berto Bayeng stands proud to be one of the 113 agricultural extension workers (AEWs) in the province of Benguet.

## Early beginnings

Bayeng, who serves as an agricultural technologist (AT) at the Municipal Agricultural Office (MAO) in Itogon, recalls his journey towards the service which all started in college.

"When I went to college, I wanted to enroll in Bachelor of Science in Elementary Education because elementary teachers were in demand that time but we did not have enough money. I eventually enrolled in the two-year Diploma in Agroforestry at Benguet State University (BSU). I was then a Sangguniang Kabataan official, so I was able to finish the program as a scholar," he shared.

He was supposed to apply for a job after graduation but his mentors thought otherwise, saying that he was too young to work at 17 years old. With a scholarship still available, he then decided to enroll in Bachelor of Science in Agriculture (BSA).

"I was down to my last year in school which is also one of the most challenging years. My last year in college included writing my thesis and I consider myself lucky as my research got funded by the Philippine Council for Agriculture Aquatic and Natural Resources Research and Development (PCAARRD)," he recalled.

It was in the second semester of 1998 when Bayeng finally graduated with a BSA degree with a major in horticulture and minor in agribusiness.

## Journey toward agricultural extension work

Immediately after graduation, he got hired as a research assistant at the Horticulture Department of BSU. Later in 2000, the municipal local government unit (MLGU) of Itogon opened the recruitment for agriculture trainees for Japan. Bayeng applied and passed the recruitment process. He then underwent the pre-departure trainings which include lessons on Nihonggo.

"On September 15, 2001, I went to Japan and came back December 15, 2002. After that, I got hired at the MLGU of Itogon as a farm worker at the municipal nursery. Later on, I was hired as a research assistant under the Cordillera Highland Agriculture Resources Management (CHARM) Project of the Department of Agriculture Regional Field Office in Cordillera Administrative Region (DA-RFO-CAR)," he said.

Bayeng's stay with the CHARM Project earned him a lot of lessons and experiences including being caught by members of the New People's Army in Paracelis, Mt. Province.

## Finding his heart at home

Bayeng then went back home to work in Itogon. "I worked as a casual employee for four months and as a volunteer for a month before I was appointed as a permanent AT in 2003.

My first assignment was with the rice program and that was the time I became fully in contact with the Agricultural Training Institute-Cordillera Administrative Region (ATI-CAR). The DA, through the DA-RFO-CAR and the ATI-CAR, in partnership with MLGUs, were implementing the Farmer-Led Extension Program, techno demos, and the Palay Check System Farmers' Field School (FFS)," he narrated.

Convincing farmers tested his patience and perseverance. "In Itogon, agriculture is treated as just an option because we have the mines and that was a big challenge on our part. Most of our farmers are also small-scale miners and during the times when the price and production of gold are at its peak, the farmers can afford to leave their farms in exchange for the search of gold. One of my officemates even experienced being frowned at by farmers who even asked how much he earns from being an AT (as compared with what they can earn from mining)."

Being an AT brings a lot of challenges, says Bayeng. "Itogon has a unique characteristic (compared with other municipalities in Benguet) in terms of rice production. Most of our rice farmers in Itogon are tenants, the owner of most vast lands in Itogon are rich families who reside either in Poblacion, Itogon or in Baguio City. Since the land owners provide all of the inputs, the farmers are less inclined towards new technologies to improve their yield. This forced me to negotiate with the land owners, explain the program to them, and ask for their permission to let their farms be used as venue for the FFS. This way, the farmers consented to participate in the

FFS."

Rice farmers in Itogon, Bayeng described, are more interested in the quality of a rice variety than the yield, thus, the farmers tend to stick into one variety for a very long time. "Through the FFS, we were able to try and compare various varieties. We also tried the recommended cultural practices in rice production and compared it with the usual farmer's practices in Itogon. Today, I am confident to say that our rice farmers in Itogon have a wider choice of varieties and practices best suited to their farm. They are now receptive to our programs since they themselves saw and experienced the difference."

## The research continues

Bayeng also continued his research activities at the MAO on different commodities including jackfruit and taro. "Itogon actually has a very big potential for root crops especially taro. However, because it grows everywhere, it is not being valued that much. Taro in Itogon is just being given away or serves as feed for pigs while it is so expensive in Baguio City. This gave me the idea of proposing a research on taro which the MAO again approved and funded."

As an agriculturist in the field of research, he was able to read various researches and technologies in agriculture that he wished to try at home. "The farmers also believed that the bigger planting materials are, the better the yield will be. I thought that taro plantlets can be used as good planting materials and the bigger corms can be sold since these commands a higher market price. I then proposed trying taro plantlets in Itogon, thinking that it was site-specific. The farmers laughed at me but we proceeded nonetheless. The farmers told me that the plantlets will be rotten in two weeks. I came back two weeks after and, to their surprise, the plantlets were growing just like the planting materials they used. We also harvested at the same time and gathered almost the same yield."

Bayeng also persistently convinced the farmers to also venture into taro production since it is a very promising venture. "In a square meter of a taro field with a distance of 50 by 75 centimeters, you can plant six hills and that will still produce offshoots. In a square meter you can harvest a minimum of three kilograms of premium tubers which can be sold to as high as P50.00 per kilo while the offshoots can be sold as food or as planting materials which is P2.00 per piece in Itogon."

## Opportunities and chances

True to his duties as a civil servant and as an extension worker, Bayeng earned the trust and respect of his officemates and the officials of Itogon. Even though he was the youngest staff, he was designated as the officer-in-charge (OIC) Municipal Agriculturist (MA) of Itogon in October 2011.

In the entire month that he served as the OIC, he was able to lead the MLGU's application for the establishment of a Farmers' Information

and Technology Service (FITS) Center under the Techno Gabay Program in their office. Even after his designation as OIC at the MAO, Bayeng was appointed as the FITS Center Manager by the new MA, Dr. Prudencio B. Pedro, because of his capabilities as an extension worker.

## Birth of the organic extensionist

In 2012, Bayeng was designated as the Municipal Organic Agriculture (OA) Focal Person. At that time, farmers in Itogon have a very low rate of adoption of OA.

"Applying the same strategy that we adopted under the Rice Program and with the help of ATI-CAR's FFS under the Organic Agriculture Program, I took the opportunity to change the perspective of our farmers and increase the adoption of OA in Itogon," he said.

Today there are three OA organizations in Itogon, namely, the Itogon Kintoman Group, the Ampucao Organic Farmers Association, and the Barangay Loakan Organic Farmers Association (BLOFA) who were organized and are being continuously capacitated by Bayeng who serves as their facilitator. "The Itogon Kintoman Group and the Ampucao Organic Farmers Association are now on their International Control Services (ICS) Phase 2 and ICS Phase 3, respectively, while the BLOFA is now applying for their Third Party Certification from the Organic Certification Center of the Philippines (OCCP)."

Itogon is the only municipality in CAR that has an ordinance declaring it as an Organic

Agriculture Municipality. Bayeng is also promoting the integration of OA within mining communities in Itogon through urban gardening. In 2015 and 2016, the municipality was awarded the Regional Outstanding OA Municipality under the LGU category.

## Staying inspired

Bayeng dreams big for the agriculture sector of Itogon. "I want to further institutionalize our programs at the municipal level. We started with the OA Program, we have our ordinances, now we will focus on the institutionalization of the budget. I am hoping that whoever will run the programs in the future, these will still be funded and carried out."

Bayeng's efforts as an AEW did not go unnoticed in the Itogon MLGU, Provincial LGU of Benguet, and the DA. In 2014, he was awarded as the Regional Outstanding Municipal Focal Person on OA and, in 2015, he was recognized as the Regional Outstanding AEW. In 2016, Bayeng was also awarded the Regional Outstanding OA Focal Person.

Bayeng shares his thoughts on how he keeps his optimism high amidst the challenges of being an AEW. "In most cases when an AT enters government service in the MLGU, he or she will retire as an AT just the same, unless they are appointed as the MA. That is the picture of AEWs in most MLGUs—we have a very small window for promotion. Of course, there are still a lot of other discouragements and obstacles along the way. However, when you see that your job needs you and your clients need you, all of the discouragements and negative thoughts will disappear."



# PEARL OF PALAYAN CITY: MODEL FARMING FAMILY

Shanemie Carelle O. Daquio

Palayan City is home to two of Nueva Ecija's prime products—Blast (calamansi juice drink) and Palaman-C (calamansi jam). Apart from these citrus-based items, Palayan is also the home of a family whose members' interest in agriculture was embedded early on in their bloodline. Each one believes that farming is made easier when everyone in the family works together.

## Pearl of Palayan

Most farmers are born while some are made. The Perlas family, from Brgy. Aulo, Palayan City, Nueva Ecija, is a testament to the latter. Born in Rizal, Ernesto Perlas, Sr., or Jun to his friends, was a telecommunication technician before he became a farmer. His better half, Josephine Perlas, a registered nurse-turned-farmer is now a proud member of the Volunteer Leaders Association of the Philippines (VLAP). They have successfully run their seven-hectare land by also giving each of their four sons a role to play. The second, Ernesto, Jr., is currently the president of Brgy. Aulo, Palayan City's 4-H Club while his two younger brothers are members.

Upon returning to the Philippines after working as an overseas Filipino worker, Jun chose to venture into farming. He accepted this new challenge after attending various trainings offered by the Agricultural Training Institute (ATI) in Central Luzon.

"I joined trainings on growing rice, corn, and vegetables as well as Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) on corn, fruits, and vegetables. I sincerely thank the ATI for the learnings I acquired, which I gladly share to my co-barangay members. I likewise share what I've learned as a Local Farm Technician (LFT) to my fellow farmers here in Palayan City," describes Jun.

"As a farmer, the impact of these trainings were clearly seen when my income increased. From 80 cavans, our fields now yield 120 cavans of rice per hectare per year. Moreover, my children were able to finish their studies thanks to agriculture," adds Jun.



## The family that plants together, learns together and wins awards together

Ernesto Jr., or simply J.R. to his friends, was given a chance to learn about livestock production in Japan for 11 months last 2015. His goal was to apply everything he learned once he is back home.

"It is a joy to share my knowledge especially to kids who do nothing in the barangay so that they won't cause trouble in the neighborhood. In addition, I hope agriculture can help change people's perception about the youth for the better," explains J.R.

Josephine, on the other hand, has attended a number of trainings conducted by the center for women and VLAP members. She wishes to guide the youth, especially those from the 4-H Club in Brgy. Aulo, and encourage them to take part in the activities of the club.

Furthermore, the Perlas family has been chosen as this year's Regional Gawad Saka Outstanding Farm Family awardee.

## Overcoming Challenges

Due to various invitations from other agencies to serve as resource speaker on rice, corn, and fruits and vegetable production, Jun's time to manage their land has become limited. Nevertheless, he is still grateful for the opportunity to share his knowledge. In moments like these, he can rely on his son J.R. to take over and run the farm. As to the funds needed to maintain operations, he submits proposals to the Municipal Agriculture Office for financial support. Also, his land is being used as a Farmers' Field School site during Training of Trainers (TOTs) and other training activities.

## Advocating for renewable source of energy

"As an electronic and telecommunication technician, I've found that using solar panels here at home is a big help in saving a lot of money on electricity. I hope that my fellow farmers, especially in places with no electric power, can adopt this. Although the initial capital to install solar panel is quite expensive, the benefits are long-term," reveals Jun.

His advocacy includes giving free consultations on the use of solar panels and gladly helping anyone who wishes to assemble their own.

In the near future, the Perlas family intends to expand their land so it can become a farm tourism site someday. At the moment, because of their participation in the projects of the ATI, their farm was chosen as one of the new Learning Sites in Central Luzon.

## Inspiring other farmers

"Always try to learn new things. Don't look at the now, but look into the future. Always think long-term because today will pass. The future may still be far ahead but with the ingenuity of Filipinos, we can go and achieve more," encourages Jun.

Indeed, Palayan City is blessed to have the Perlas family around, for not all go beyond the call of duty, especially in the community. May their story inspire others to see opportunities, and not just challenges, in agriculture.

# FOREVER GRATEFUL:

## Surviving the Transition from Diesel Mechanic to Renowned Farmer

Ralph Marco I. Cabrera

Rolando Rocapor started as a diesel mechanic in Rosario, La Union. He once aspired to become a law enforcer but his father needed assistance in their farm, so he took up a vocational course instead. After finishing his course, he had several jobs in the province until he became chief mechanic in a firm based in San Juan, La Union.

His father then encouraged him to go back home and till the 600-square-meter land. As he started to nurture his land, he had some frustrations. For what he had was an unproductive land without machinery and other needed resources to develop the farm, so he decided to go back to his previous job.

After sometime, he saved enough money to buy farm inputs and challenged himself to try agriculture once again. Alongside his farm project, he began to venture in livestock with two heads of cattle for fattening. He tried every strategy to succeed in agriculture. He planted several crops such as rice, young corn, peanut, pepper, eggplant, okra, tomatoes, kangkong, upo, dragon fruit, sunflower, banana, malunggay, among others. With the support and collective efforts of his wife, Cristina, and his children, Joy and Robert, Mang Lando was finally able to transform his dormant parcel into a busy and fertile farm. This then allowed the family to acquire additional farmlands.

This experience encouraged them to push further and grab every opportunity to attend seminars and trainings conducted by the Department of Agriculture-Regional Field Office (DA-RFO) I, Agricultural Training Institute-Regional Training Center (ATI-RTC) I, Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE), Philippine Rice Research Institute, and non-government agencies. He then put to practice what he learned from these trainings such as diversified farming, vermicomposting, natural farming, and other best farming practices.

Mang Lando's dragon fruit cactus intercropped with malunggay became famous after a Korean guest saw his technology and proposed to buy all his dragon fruits. The Korean guest said these fruits could be of help to his father who has prostate cancer since both dragon fruit and malunggay are antioxidants. He also adopted and improved the technology on "babuyang walang amoy," fermented seaweeds into foliar fertilizers, and young corn production which earned the family more profits. Comparing to the usual corn variety, Mang Lando said that young corn is a rotational crop which he can harvest after 45 days and the corn husks can be used to feed farm animals. After 30 days of fallow period, he can once again plant the crop.

With intense move of supporting his fellow farmers, he organized the Corn Growers Association in their locality in 2008. It was structured and registered as the Farmers Association Innovative Technology and Harvest (FAITH) of Rosario, La Union. This was when good things started to come, for they were recognized for their support to the implementation of the "Adopt an Estero/Water Body" program of the DENR. The award cited their efforts to encourage other partners towards environmental technology.

From then on, triumphs started pouring in for his family. Mang Lando's hard work continuously bloomed as he and his family won several awards from the local up to the national level. Among them were the Most Outstanding Aerobic Rice Farmer in 2010, Most Outstanding Rice Farmer Adopting Integrated Farming Systems in 2011, and Outstanding Farm Family 2013 from "The Outstanding Farmers of the Philippines" program of the Junior Chamber International Philippines and the Universal Harvester, Incorporated. Mang Lando's family also won the most prestigious award from the DA's Gawad Saka Search as the Outstanding Farm Family in 2014.

Amid all these achievements, Mang Lando constantly lends his hand to other farmers by sharing his technologies in trainings, seminars, and demonstrations in his farm. He is also an active partner in the activities for the rural-based organizations. This is why ATI-RTC I chose his farm as a Learning Site for Integrated Farming Systems and was later elevated as a School for Practical Agriculture because of his devotion and initiative in promoting different agricultural practices in the community. The Rocapors' farm also hosted out-of-school youth and students of the ATI's Ladderized Course on Agri-entrepreneurship.

"I hope that all farmers will persevere and work hard to attain their goals of self-sufficiency. I hope they never give up," Mang Lando said. This has been his aspiration for all farmers especially those who are thinking of leaving farming.

There is no doubt that everything happens for a reason. Over time, Mang Lando realized that with strong determination, life can still turn out better despite having broken dreams.



# Farming as a lifetime profession for Ella Pobre

Hannadi S. Guiamad



We are in an age where women are already empowered and ready to compete with men in terms of their contribution in the community.

"Ma'am Ella was my elementary teacher and I will never forget her because she was the reason why I believed that agriculture is a noble profession," said Edmundo Guleng, Municipal Agriculturist (MA) of Alamada, North Cotabato, when asked about Ella Pobre.

Ella Duterte Pobre is a 73-year-old loving grandmother who hails from Alamada. Alamada is considered as one of the progressive areas in Cotabato because of its vast agricultural land and products. It has been very religious in their quest in advancing agricultural development.

Edmundo is not the first and the only one whose life had been touched by Ella. She was a dedicated teacher for 40 years where she started to cultivate minds and encourage young people to never forget farming aside from their pursuit of personal dreams and aspirations in life. Upon her retirement, she continued to be of service to the public. She was elected as Municipal Councilor and also served as Barangay Captain of Lower Dado for 10 years.

"I fell in love with agriculture since I was a child and turned out to be more enthusiastic about it after I became a wife to a dedicated farmer. So, when I became a teacher, I always tell my students to not underestimate farming," Ella said.

"My husband, Erasmo, and I decided to venture into farming because we wanted to provide better lives for our children. We owe everything we have now in our farm," Ella, a mother of four, proudly said. Their children also spent their time developing their six-hectare farm even if they already have landed good jobs here and abroad.

The farm, now a resort, is known not only in Alamada but in the nearby places upon its opening as Hidden Spring Resort. The farm was truly blessed because the spring provides sufficient water supply to her three-hectare irrigated rice terraces that surrounds the swimming

pools, hence, the name Hidden Spring Resort. "There's a funny story on how we acquired this area 25 years ago," she excitedly said. "I used to pass by this area long time ago and drink some water from the spring. I was really amazed and really wanted to own it, so I talked to the spring and said 'sana maging akin ka sa susunod'. God did the rest," she shared.

## Innovations and Recognitions

The Municipal Agricultural Office (MAO) guided her as she developed the farm and includes her in the training programs and local tours they were conducting. As usual, she never failed them. She puts into practice what she was learning and constantly shares it to her neighbors. As dedicated as she is to farming, she was declared as Gawad Saka awardee in 2014 because of her unique technique in inducing mangosteen trees to bear fruit twice a year. There is usually only one mangosteen season in a year but, for Ella's family, they can harvest twice.

When asked how they do it, "After harvesting, we immediately apply organic fertilizers and other organic matter that we have from the kitchen and swine and livestock areas. We also apply two kilograms of 14-14-14 or complete fertilizer and two kilogram of urea per tree," she generously shared. "Mangosteen will bear fruit when new leaves start to sprout and that's the time we apply again complete fertilizer," she further said.

The Agricultural Training Institute (ATI) found out about Ella's contribution in the community and her ability to influence other farmers, hence, the Hidden Spring Resort became one of its Schools for Practical Agriculture (SPA) in 2015. The ATI helped her put up small training rooms and a dormitory that can accommodate 50 to 60 persons. This is good enough to host one batch of training.

After a few months, Ella's SPA started to become a venue for various training programs and activities conducted by government and non-government organizations. In some of the trainings, Ella served as resource person and never fail to share her knowledge and secrets to success to visiting farmers.

Edmundo said that the SPA also turned out to be very helpful for the MAO because when they conduct agriculture-related trainings, they don't bring their farmers to expensive venues anymore nor make them imagine in the four corners of the room. Farmers can easily be convinced if they see it for themselves through the SPA. Ella's SPA instantly became a little training center in the area.

Each time that Ella is being asked by farmers how she reached the average yield of 90 to 95 sacks in their one-hectare upland organic rice production, the kind-hearted woman would just say "just have a perfect land preparation, plant on time, and trust God."

Farming is a noble profession and it is a lifetime one according to Ella. If failure comes because of inevitable circumstances such as the El Niño phenomenon and other calamities, just "look at the brighter side of life and do better the next time around," she humbly declared.

"Life is short and you will pass this way once so whatever good things you can do to make your life and other people's lives better, do it now, for you will never pass this way again," she tearfully said. The couple just celebrated their golden wedding anniversary last December 2015 and they celebrated it at the farm with the important people in their lives, including the farmers they have inspired. They reiterated that farming has been a significant part of their 50-year long journey on love.

Indeed, Ella's is a special story of a woman who has exceeded all expectations of staying at home, doing the dishes, and taking care of the family. Ella has also proven that public service does not necessarily require titles from the government offices and that farming is something that can be proud of.

This is just one of the hundreds of stories of Filipinos who took the risks in venturing into agriculture and believed that one day, farming will change their lives.



# THERE'S MONEY IN HONEY

Lucille L. Bocado

Other than honey and sugary products, bees have something sweeter to offer.

Aside from being a lucrative source of income to farmers, beekeeping is now becoming a promising job for people who want to have a stable income.

Other countries have enlisted beekeeping as one of the most in-demand jobs today. Countries like Canada and Australia offer as high as \$4,000 or close to P155,000 salary a month for workers in this industry.

Filipinos are already part of the beekeeping industry and employment agencies have been constantly sending workers abroad since 2006.

Until now, academic institutions and private organizations are conducting beekeeping trainings and seminars all over the country. One of the notable bee farms that conduct trainings on beekeeping is located in Km 31, Panabo City, Davao del Norte. It is owned and operated by a 62-year-old farmer entrepreneur Epifanio Loyola, Jr.

1

## Humble Bee-ginnings

The Loyola Bee Farm started culturing honey bees way back in 1980. Loyola said that his business contributes to environment conservation and help in the increase of production of agricultural crops—through pollination.

When a rural bank offered loan to the farmers who wanted to start their honey bee production, the Panabo Beekeepers Cooperative was formed, initially with eight members. Through the the bank's financial assistance, the productivity of the bee farm increased just after several months.

Loyola's honey bee products reached wider markets as he started distributing in Mindanao and some supermarkets in Manila. Loyola's honey production rate rose significantly compared to other producers, so curious stakeholders started visiting his farm to learn about his technology and best practices.

2

## Sourly Road

The road to success wasn't at all that smooth for Loyola. He suffered setbacks like slow supply of queens and vanishing honey bees. Apparently, the regular supply of queens could hardly keep up with the growing demand for production.

The humble farmer revealed that in 2015, the beekeeping industry also experienced a major setback when small hive beetles, which were first sighted in Lupon, Davao Oriental, threatened the production of bees.

The beetles affected the conservation of indigenous bees and pollination activities in many areas. This phenomenon was the first-ever recorded infestation in the Philippines.

More than the phenomenon, changes in climate and the effect of typhoons were the significant environmental factors that also affected the normal cycle of the bees resulting in the unsuccessful existence of queens in the social colonies.

"Since we hardly breed queens here because of predators, we resorted to importing queen bees which is very costly," Loyola exclaimed. The unforeseen event brought damage in the honey production industry resulting in income losses.

## Sweetening again

Despite the problems besetting the industry, Loyola persevered and thought of regularly training the farmers on proper raising of bees, highlighting the value of good agricultural practices. He believes that stimulating beekeeping in rural areas is extremely important.

Loyola began to give casual lectures and informal talks to interested farmers. Even farmers from faraway places have opted to set up tents just to attend his beekeeping trainings.

"As the number of participants increased day by day, I found it difficult to accommodate all of them. I had no choice but to ask for training fees to defray expenses on food and proper accommodation for the farmers," Loyola said.



## Returning the favor

Now, Loyola offers two-day lectures on proper beekeeping for a fee of P1,500 per participant. The amount also covers an extensive three-month hands-on training, instilling knowledge and proper techniques on hive management.

"The training module includes hive and material-making: queen rearing, uniting and splitting colonies, honey, pollen and propolis production, and marketing," said Loyola.

"It was never part of my plan to train beekeepers but when the demand got higher in the country, I used the opportunity to help other people who want to engage in this business," Loyola added.

With his success in the beekeeping industry, opportunities came knocking for Loyola. He was offered a teaching position for Apiculture at the University of the Philippines-Los Baños and Don Mariano Memorial Marcos State University.

However, he declined the offer since he said that he can "share more of his knowledge to the farmers in an informal setting." That was when the Beekeepers Network Foundation (BeeNet) Philippines started.

With the assistance from the Department of Agriculture (DA), under the Agricultural Competitiveness Enhancement Fund, the BeeNet Philippines was organized. In 1994, Loyola started heading the Mindanao cluster of the BeeNet Philippines where the aspiring beekeepers he trained automatically became a member of the organization.

Later, the organization was affiliated to APIMONDIA or International Federation of Beekeepers' Associations, a global organization of scientists and beekeepers in the world. Starting with only few members back then, Loyola is currently leading the Mindanao BeeNet Philippines with over 2,000 members and counting.

"It will be a good credential for the beekeeper if he or she is a member of APIMONDIA as this will be a ticket to work abroad," Loyola said. APIMONDIA is on the shopping list of the employers abroad looking for beekeepers.

Loyola helped Filipino beekeepers to be qualified to work in the US, Australia, Canada and New Zealand. Some of them are farmers and employees who left their jobs to work in a high-paying job as beekeepers abroad.

According to Loyola, employers hire workers with three to five years of experience in beekeeping. He also recommends those who display special skills and interest in the job regardless of their years of experience.

As his name became known in the agriculture sector, he was nominated by farmer associations to be their representative to coordinate with the various agencies of the government particularly the DA.

It was during one of the agency's meetings that Loyola learned about the financial and technical assistance being extended by the Agricultural Training Institute (ATI) XI to further develop small farms. After completing the requirements, the Loyola Bee Farm was accredited as an ATI Learning Site on Honeybee Production and was awarded financial assistance for the development of the farm.

"We saw that Loyola needed support to strengthen what he started," OIC Center Director Emelia Gadingan of ATI-XI said.

In October 2015, ATI-XI turned over P100,000 for the establishment of the training hall that has long been a needed facility of his farm. The Loyola Bee Farm is now a Learning Site or model farm of ATI-XI on Honeybee Culture.

"I am very grateful to ATI-XI for the financial assistance which helped me with the business. Stakeholders from the beekeeping industry in the US and Poland and scientists have visited my farm and noticed the improvements because of the support from the government," Loyola narrated.

From just 20 participants, his farm can now accommodate up to 60 people because of the wider and convenient training venue that would be helpful to their learning process.

"We are honored that the ATI is helping our Filipino workers get a better job that would support their families in the long run," Gadingan said.

Currently, ATI-XI is continuously assisting the farm so that it could level up as a School Practical Agriculture and eventually an Agri-Tourism Site, the next phases of the ATI ladderized approach to extension services after the farm is accredited as Learning Site.

As Filipino workers continue to reap the sweeter rewards in culturing honeybee, the government assures that their assistance will never perish thus be strengthened.



## Killing Two Birds with One Stone

Six months into his acceptance to the EHRDP, Engr. Ferry was able to persuade three of his office's Science Specialists to pursue their master's through the EHRDP. As a result, an increase in project support came from different agencies. One of these was a collaboration with the Department of Social and Welfare Development (DSWD) on the Lingap Kabuhayan Program, which installs cashew farmers as Agri-preneurs with cashew processing as their livelihood. One of its member cooperatives from Taytay, Palawan, the SEA-K Multi-Purpose Cooperative, also a beneficiary of the CEP, was awarded in 2015 by DSWD as 'Best Livelihood Cooperative' in the region, and in the Philippines.

In addition, the Bureau of Agricultural Research (BAR) funded several PAES-initiated projects and researches such as: Techno Commercialization of Cashew, Cashew Enhancement Seedling Production, Soybean Research Project, and Intercropping of Cashew, to name a few. Such programs and projects create value-adding activities to the lives of small-scale farmers in terms of product-processing, development, and marketing. At present, almost 50% of cashew farmers are selling semi-processed and packaged cashew nuts, instead of unprocessed, to food processing manufacturers all over Puerto Princesa City and Metro Manila.

At this point, the Cashew Enhancement Program has sourced out a total of P20M fund from BAR alone.

## Moving Up and Forward

With the support of the EHRDP Scholarship, Engr. Ferry was able to transform the Station into an outstanding RD&E Management Agency. Furthermore, DA-PAES was awarded Center of Excellence on Cashew R&D.

As for his career, Engr. Ferry has been recently designated as Officer-In-Charge, Regional Technical Director for Operation in DA MIMAROPA Regional Field Office.

# VALUE THE CASHEW:

## Scholar's Quest to Uplift the Life of Cashew Farmers in Palawan

Rae Bernadette Ianna M. Lapitan

With the aim of improving the cashew production and expanding the existing plantation, the Department of Agriculture-Palawan Agricultural Experiment Station (DA-PAES) launched a Cashew Enhancement Project, which considered cashew processing as a source of livelihood in the rural communities to support growing tourism in the province. The implementation of the project focused on four components, namely:

- (1) Institutional Support Services;
- (2) Technology Promotion and Development;
- (3) Agribusiness and Enterprise Development; and
- (4) Management and Administrative Services.

The Project ran from 2005 until 2013.

## Jump-off Point

Palawan, Philippines, the largest province in the country, is composed of approximately 1.4 million hectares. Like other provinces, it is also home to agricultural land, forest, marine, and other indigenous resources. Palawan is also the leading cashew production province in the country, where more than 90% of the total 6.3 million bearing trees are found. Currently, only the nut of the cashew fruit is valued by the farmers since there is a good demand for its consumption.

In order to up the ante of research, development, and extension (RD&E) of his office, Engr. Elmer Ferry, PhD, Center Chief of Palawan Agricultural Experiment Station, Department of Agriculture IV-B (DA-PAES IV-B), seized the opportunity provided by the Expanded Human Resource Development Program (EHRDP) through the Agricultural Training Institute (ATI). "It is my dream to bring my office to the higher standard of quality RD&E that can compete against national and international standards." At the time, only Engr. Ferry was a master's degree holder. In order to increase the credibility of the Station and attract donors and research grants, the skills and capacity of its staff need to level up as well.

The EHRDP is a scholarship offered to all DA staff and technical, scientific, and extension workers and practitioners in the agriculture and fisheries sector. Engr. Ferry is amongst the recipients included in the 3rd batch of the program. Through the scholarship, he was able to evaluate the Cashew Enhancement Project (CEP) in which the results of the study were used to improve projects and programs related to cashew farming.



# FROM COCKFIGHTING TO FARMING

Janine L. Cailo

Ramon Urminita, or Ka Ramon to his friends and family, is one of the Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) practitioner in Region IV-A. His farm is located in Brgy. San Isidro, Antipolo City, Rizal with a land area of 1.1 hectare of GAP-certified "pakbet vegetables" specifically okra, kalabasa, sitaw, and ampalaya.

## As he started

Before he became a full-fledged farmer, he worked as derby training handler for three years. As his children went to college, he decided to quit being a handler as he was becoming addicted to cockfighting. "Nahiya ako sa sarili ko dahil ang mga kinukuha ng mga anak ko ay pagtuturo at ayaw kong masabihan sila ang ama nila ay lulong sa pagsasabong," he recalls.

In 2000, he started farming as a source of income and, eventually, it was the start of a new career. "Dito ko sa bukid naisip pumunta at dito ako nag self-rehab, malayo sa mga kabarkada at malayo sa tukso."

He is grateful to farming because it helps him go back to the right direction of life. "Malaking bahagi sa akin ang pagsasaka dahil 'yon ang naging daan ko para makawala sa multo ng pagsasabong," says Ka Ramon.

Ka Ramon and his wife were able to send their three children to college through farming. Now, his two children serve as school teachers and his youngest daughter works as a manager at a fast-food restaurant.

## As a Magsasaka Siyentista

A Magsasaka Siyentista (MS) is an outstanding farmer who is successful in his/her science and technology-based and indigenous technologies and complements the Farmers' Information and Technology Services (FITS) Center. Ka Ramon is an active and an achiever MS of the FITS Center in Antipolo City.

Ka Ramon, as an MS, served as a resource person in Techno Gabay Program (TGP) activities. He also provides farmer-to-farmer advisory service. He conducted a science and technology-based farm (STBF) on varietal trial of off-season tomato, a research component of an MS under the Philippine Council for Agriculture, Aquatic and Natural Resources Research and Development (PCAARRD).

This is to showcase his science and technology intervention in his farm. Ka Ramon acknowledges the big role of the Agricultural Training Institute Region Training Center IV-A (ATI RTC IV-A) as MS and being a farmer in which he applies the technologies he learned from seminars and cross-visits he attended. "Malaking tulong sa akin ng pagiging MS dahil napapadala nila kami sa ibat-ibang probinsya at rehiyon. Lumalawak ang aming kaalaman sa pagsasaka dahil sa trainings ng ATI," he proudly says.

He is one of the Outstanding MS finalists in 2010-2012. To include in his milestone, he is also nominated as a Regional Outstanding High Value Crops (HVCC) Farmer for 2010-2011. "Naasistihan kami ng ATI, may dumadating na tulong talaga," he adds. Currently, he is working on his varietal trial of soy beans.

## As a GAP practitioner

As a MS, Ka Ramon continues to learn innovations in agriculture and actively participates in all trainings he attended. In 2014, he attended a training on Good Agricultural Practices for High Value Crops in the Department of Agriculture (DA) Southern Tagalog Integrated Agricultural Research Center (STIARC) at Lipa City, Batangas. Here, he learned the concepts and principles of GAP. "Napakalaking oportunidad sa aming magsasaka na maging GAP-certified dahil magkakaroon ng kalidad at ligtas ang aming ani," Ka Ramon explains.

With the assistance of the DA Region IV-A, his farm in Antipolo City became certified as GAP for High Value Crops on May 27, 2015. "Masasabi naming ligtas at nakasisiguro sila [ang mamimili] na hindi sila makakakain ng mga may lasong pagkain," he confidently claims.

Ka Ramon compares the big difference of his practices before he became a GAP practitioner. "Ang ani ko halos [baratin] na sa palengke, ngayon maipagmamalaki kong ito ay hindi basta itinanim at inani lang. Bagkus, may mga pamamaraan at alituntunin akong

sinusunod. Tumaas na din ang kalidad ng aking mga harvest na gulay kaya medyo tumaas din ang presyo," he says.

How does GAP help Ka Ramon? "Simula nang maging GAP-certified ang aking taniman ay nakapag-pundar ako. Dati namamasahe lang ako papunta dito sa farm. Ngayon, nakabili na ako ng motor."

## As MS and GAP Practitioner

He believes in hard work to achieve success. He encourages other farmers to be GAP-certified because it would help increase the profit of the farm. "Ang mamimili na ang lumalapit sa akin," Ka Ramon shares.

"Kailangan pong magkaroon tayo ng disiplina at dedikasyon," he says, pausing for a moment. "Sabi nga, sipag at tiyaga lang dahil ang pagtanim sa pamamaraan ng GAP ay napaka-masalimuot din, walang shortcuts," Ka Ramon shares, as he remembers his experiences before giving a satisfying smile.





# BREWING SUCCESS IN COFFEE BUSINESS

Joshua B. Mercado



Danny Thomas, an American comedian, once said, "Success has nothing to do with what you gain in life or accomplish for yourself. It is what you do for others."

This was done successfully by a businesswoman who succeeded in her endeavor and undertakings. Yet, she did not stop there. Along her climb to success, she brought with her more people. She endowed them with the opportunity to also succeed and improve their own lives.

When you happen to pass by the very busy bus station of Maramag, Bukidnon, there is a small kiosk situated in one corner. That small kiosk is a product of a vision to improve the lives of the coffee farmers in the municipality. It is a product born out of great patience and sacrifice exerted by the person who transcended beyond self-gain to ease the burden of coffee farmers. It is a kiosk of dreams, which slowly crept into reality.

## THE PRIME MOVER

Imelda Paulican-Mendoza was given the very rare chance to give others the opportunity to improve their lives. She is a successful businesswoman in Maramag, Bukidnon, operating a restaurant and a catering service provider in the municipality, among others.

She could have stopped there. She is already enjoying her life, relishing the fruits of her labor and hard work. But then, she chose to lend her hand to the then struggling farmers in the municipality. She decided to help.

## THE SLOW START

She started by reactivating the Rural Improvement Club (RIC) of Maramag, Bukidnon back in 2010. "We started with only P8,800 and allocated it to teaching our members on food processing, handicraft-making and livestock-raising, among others," she recalled. Bebing, as she is fondly called, was elected president of the RIC. She devoted some of her time, money, and efforts to improve the lives of the members by bringing in income-generating opportunities for the club. "It was an uphill

climb when we started. There was a slow pace in terms of generating revenue for the club," she added.

## THE BOOST

There was a complete turn-around when in 2012, the Department of Agriculture-High Value Crops Development Program (DA-HVCDP), in collaboration with the Kaanib Foundation, granted a coffee roasting facility in the municipality which included a coffee roasting system, commercial grade grinder, foot sealer, a cutter, weighing scale, and foil for packaging.

The local government unit of Maramag also gave their share by allocating a stall situated in the municipal bus station where they can display their products. The funds for the construction of the kiosk were provided by the Catholic Relief Services (CRS). Other non-government organizations assisted in the realization of the project such as the Diocese Social Action Center and the Advocates of Philippine Fair Trade, Inc.

It was at that time that the group networked with the Agricultural Training Institute (ATI). The ATI provided a Training of Trainers on Coffee Production. Along with the training, the ATI also provided funds worth P300,000 for the capability-building of the members and the farmer-suppliers. It also sent Bebing as a representative of Kape Maramag to the Association of South East Asian Nations

Training Course on Intensive Cultivation Technique of Coffee in Thu Dao Mot City, Binh Duong, Vietnam.

Currently, the Rural Improvement Club Federation of Kape Maramag, Inc. has already 1,050 members with an aggregated total land area of 525 hectares of farmland scattered in the Municipality of Maramag, Bukidnon. From the starting capital of P8,800, the total aggregated assets of the club swelled to more than P4 million.

"We are selling Arabica, Robusta, and Excelsa coffee. We also have our special blend of coffee which is a combination of the abovementioned varieties. Our clients include government offices and walk-in buyers in the stall," explained Lilibeth Gatendez, a member of the club.

The once sleepy organization was now awakened and invigorated by the very delightful aroma in coffee business. In an instant, it grew and soared to greater heights. Blended with hard work and determination, success has already been brewed for Kape Maramag.

But, how did Kape Maramag reach such great feat in just a very short span of time?

## THE INFUSION OF PARTNERSHIP

The rich and fertile soils of Maramag is home to many coffee farmers. One of the problems they faced before Kape Maramag came was the lack of market for their produce. Although many roads have been paved and established, the high cost of labor and transportation was a major predicament. They had to transport their produce to the neighboring provinces to sell it. Furthermore, the price of their produce was not fixed. It was a great hassle for the coffee farmers to transport their products, paying very high cost and sell their products at a very low price. As a result, they got low profit from the hard work they exerted. Some farmers got discouraged. Worse, some even stopped coffee production and turned their farms to rice paddies.

As Kape Maramag came into the picture, coffee farmers started to produce coffee again. Kape Maramag buys their produce at a very competitive price with lesser labor and transportation cost.

Cornelio Eraya, a coffee farmer from the far-flung barangay of Bagong Silang in Maramag, felt the convenience it brought to him when Kape Maramag came. "At first, when Kape Maramag was not yet in the market, it will take a minimum of two days to go and sell my produce to the neighboring provinces like Cotabato and Misamis Oriental. When Kape Maramag came, transportation cost became lesser and it only takes a maximum of one day to return home. I can return quickly to my farm and do other important chores. Furthermore, they buy our produce at a relatively higher price compared to other buyers, among them is a known multinational company. So we prefer to sell our produce to Kape Maramag," explained Eraya.

Eraya is only one of the many coffee farmers who benefited from the establishment of Kape Maramag. Indeed, Kape Maramag is a symbol of inclusive growth. Not only for the farmers but also to the flourishing economy of the municipality and the province as a whole. The efforts of Bebing resonated and will forever be immortalized by the people whom she helped. She is very successful, not only in earning income, but also in helping other people succeed. This is a brewed partnership that will go a very long way.





# GINGER:

## Does it ring a bell?

Karl Louise Maligaya Salibio

Young people are running away from farming now. Everyone is going to the city and it seems like nobody likes to work with the soil anymore. Ironically, farming provides food on the table. But we believe in numbers and figures now since we need money to survive. However, we are convinced with numbers and figures, since we need money to survive. What if you can earn P2 million a year just by tilling the soil, will it ring a bell?

## FROM POLITICS TO FARMING

Loreto Leo Ocampos is the owner of Hoyohoy Highland Stone Chapel Organic Farm & Adventure Park in Tangub City, Misamis Occidental. He is also the former governor of the province. Retirement from politics put him on the path to realize and finally commit himself in agriculture and organic farming. Now, he is one of the strongest advocates of organic farming in Mindanao. He assures the youth that farming is a profitable venture since he has been doing it for so many years. As the saying goes, 'just charge it to experience.' Few months from now, he will be harvesting his produce from the 3,000 sacks of ginger. From this, he targets to raise P2 million. With almost P30,000 to P40,000 as capital, this made his income 4,900 times bigger than the capital. Isn't it a big amount coming from a ginger? Yes, you can really make a living from agriculture.



## THE SCIENCE BEHIND

What's so special with this multi-million ginger anyway? The production actually start by buying local varieties of ginger to be planted on the sacks. With this, you get the chance to help local providers and, at the same time, cut a lot on transportation costs. You will then need sacks that will serve as pots to hold the soil and the growth of the plant. Then, the gingers are replanted on the sacks filled with soil. The soil should be bombarded with organic fertilizers to rehabilitate its natural nutrients. The method of planting used is sacking. This is effective since it minimizes erosion because the sack holds the soil firmly; limits the growth of weeds and allows easy harvesting since the sack can just be torn apart during harvest. It is very manageable to practice. You can even do it on your small backyard since it won't really require much areas of land.



## THE SECRET

When asked about the secret to his growing business, Gov. Ocampos timidly answered 'LOVE.' He then repeated with a strong voice, "You must have the love for farming or business." Then you seek knowledge, since knowledge is something of immeasurable significance and value, he added. However, you got to stay humble, because it defines your journey and your transformation as a person. Lastly, you need to reach out and establish linkages and market.

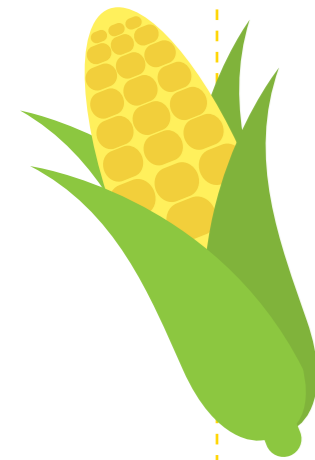
## HELPING THE COMMUNITY

Among the hired help, some would fill the bags and feed the soil with concoctions while others would plant the ginger. Gov. Ocampos' business brought employment to the community since the farm required labor force. However, nothing comes on a silver platter, that's why he made an effort to feed his mind with necessary knowledge from trainings and technical assistance coming from the different government agencies, particularly the Agricultural Training Institute. He also made sure that the market will be favorable for business. By following these strategies, he found the right pill to ease his hunger for knowledge and growth.

This is no Jack and the Beanstalk story. This is an actual success of a person who humbled himself in the name of knowledge and worked up to his last dripping sweat to assure security and growth not only for himself but also his community. Undeniably, he is a charmer, maybe because he has very subtle views about the world. Surprisingly, in his age, you can never see a single negativity. He is never eccentric, in fact, he speaks like a 14-year-old idealistic student. He's so forward-looking with feet buried deep in the ground. He's a millionaire and he's humble.

There are a lot of people who know a lot more than we do. That is a reality for us in the millennial age. We enjoy a lot more freedom than any other. We have better resources and bigger opportunities. We should know better since everything is easier now. I guess there's no harm with believing Gov. Ocampos. We all have the choice whether to be a doctor who saves lives, an engineer who builds bridges, a teacher who molds students, or maybe a farmer who feeds the world. Whatever you choose, let's not forget to feed the youth inside us. Like Gov. Ocampos who kept on growing up while growing old. Indeed, there's really a fortune in agriculture. For now, with P30,000 capital for ginger production, I look forward to earning P2 million in nine months. I guess it's good to venture into farming. Now, does it ring a bell?

Vladimir B. Caliguiran



# INSPIRED TO INSPIRE

Joselito 'Joel' Cabanayan, a Farmer Led Extension (FLE) graduate from Villaverde, Nueva Vizcaya, was inspired by his father-in-law to engage in farming. "Na-challenge ako sa biyenan ko dahil outstanding corn farmer siya," Joel revealed. As newlyweds with limited resources, Joel and his wife, Elizabeth, cultivated a hectare of land through tenancy in 1995. There, they grew eggplant and bitter melon and did backyard hog-raising.

After a decade the land owner decided to mortgage the farm to Joel for P60,000. As the new temporary owner, Joel shifted from vegetable-growing to corn farming. The following year, he was able to acquire the property.

"Dahil may kaunting pera mula sa gulayan at babuyan, nakabili rin ako ng sarili kong lupa," he proudly shared.

Corn farming was new to Joel because he was raised in Nueva Ecija where he was exposed to rice and onion farming. "Lumapit ako sa Municipal Agriculture Office (MAO) at nagtanong-tanong ako ng mga seminar," Joel recalled.

In 2006, he was chosen by the MAO to become a farmer extensionist because of his active participation in the different activities and trainings of the office.



## LEARN and teach

"Kung anong technology ang ibinigay ng Department of Agriculture (DA), 'yon din ang ipapasa ko sa kapwa ko farmers. Hindi ko rin ipinagdadamot ang mga grasya galing sa DA," Joel described. The FLE program is a strategy of the DA for technology transfer. According to Joel, his major task as FLE partner is to offer his farm to become a technology demonstration site. He is also a learning site partner of the Agricultural Training Institute (ATI)-Regional Training Center (RTC) II.

"Kapag production season na ng mais, madalas maraming tao dito. Napupuno ang kubo lalo na kapag may training at Farmers' Field School ang ATI," he said.

"Hindi ako humuhinto sa pagpapalaganap. Hindi ko ipinagdadamot 'yung mga knowledge para mapataas din ang ani nila. Kasi noon, napakababa talaga ng ani dito, pero noong may mga makabagong technology na dito, tumaas na rin," he happily added.

"Kapag nagtagal nga ako sa kwentuhan, ikinukumpara ako ni misis sa isang kandidato," he quipped.

According to Joel, becoming an effective farmer extension worker means testing first the technology before deciding if it is worth sharing or not. Even private companies are partnering with Joel for the demonstration of their new products.

"As farmer leader, tumulong ka rin sa kapwa mo magsasaka na maiangat ang pamumuhay nila," he proudly said.

### Harvest season

Joel usually yields an average of 180-200 bags of corn per hectare but also experienced harvesting 302 bags from his one-hectare farm once. "Nalulungkot na ako kapag bumaba sa 150 ang aking inani," he shared.

Through corn farming, Joel and Elizabeth managed to build their own house, buy farm machines, and send their three children to school. Their eldest, Jolly Beth, is now a licensed veterinarian, and their middle child, Jozelito, is an Information Technology graduate, while their youngest, Jury Jubet, is currently in high school.

At present, Joel is renovating their house to include a second floor which will serve as a view deck to his cornfields. "Dati inaakyat ko yung puno ng ilang-ilang para makita ang mga mais na kulang sa tubig at abono. Ngayon, hindi na ako mahihirapan dahil may second floor na ang bahay ko," he merrily shared.

According to him, his secret to success as a corn farmer is the use of the latest technologies. "Kapag may makita akong bagong technology, ina-adopt ko kaagad," the 50-year-old farmer revealed.

At present, the latest innovation in his farm is the double row planting technique. This technology optimizes land-use efficiency and productivity and is being applied to the 11-hectare corn field he manages for different owners.

## UNENDING inspiration

"Minsan ibinubukas ko ang aking gulayan sa mga tao rito. Inaalok ko silang pumitas ng gulay. Ang gusto ko ma-realize nila na kung kaya kong magtanim at umani ng gulay ay kaya rin nila."

"Maging inspirasyon ka sa kapwa mo. Para makatanggap din sila ng mga pagkilala gaya ko," Joel emphasized.

Joel is a recipient of numerous awards in corn farming and in his extension work. Recently, he received the Gawad Saka Award for being the Outstanding Corn Farmer nationwide.

At this time, it's Joel's turn to inspire the next outstanding farmer.

# LIVING IN A HAPPY, HEALTHY, & ORGANIC WAY

Ginalyn V. Arbutante

"For our love and passion of eating pure, fresh, and organic vegetables and other farm produce, we decided to venture into organic agriculture," exclaimed Pablito Catubig, Magsasaka Siyentista (MS) from San Jose, Province of Dinagat Islands. The couple chose to go back and live permanently in Aling Emma's hometown in San Jose after they got married in Cebu City. There, they strive hard to fulfill their dreams of having their own farm someday.

## Going Organic

"Mang Pabie," as his friends and neighbors call him, has been into farming for more than 30 years. According to him, organic farming is an effective system to maximize resources in a farm, which eventually results in greater profits.

The 58-year-old Mang Pabie further said that the best way to increase farm yields and income is through integrated, diversified,

and intensified organic farming. This can be achieved by planting various high value crops and vegetables, rearing animals such as goat, swine, poultry, and other livestock in their farm.

Likewise, by processing these to earn income through entrepreneurial activities and make it available for market; intensifying them through consistent production and development of products.

"We already earned income from our farm produce such as organic vegetables and animals, organic fertilizers such as vermicast, chicken dung, and other by-products out of my farm", Mang Pabie proudly said. "This in turn helped me a lot in supporting my family", he added.

As an innovative farmer, he did not limit himself to planting different crops and rearing animals even in just a small parcel of land they owned at first. Mang Pabie said that the higher profits he got from his goat production enabled him to send his children to school.

The couple always has a plan to save money no matter how small it is. As the treasurer of the Mary Sampaguita AGRA Multipurpose Cooperative (MSAMPC), Aling Emma convinced Mang Pabie to save a certain amount from the income of their farm.

Aling Emma helped her husband in the farm together with their children. The whole family has each other no matter what. They teach them and encourage them to practice smart and practical farming by going into organic agriculture.

## Humble beginning

"I started farming in 1963, when I was still 6 years old, in Cebu City. As the eldest child, my parents wanted me to know all about farming and taught me to till the soil and plant corn, vegetables, and root crops for us to survive", uttered Mang Pabie. According to him, he really wanted to finish high school or earn a college degree then but his parents disagreed on the idea. Instead, they wanted him to focus more on tilling the soil as their successor. Indeed, Mang Pabie followed what his parents told him—to concentrate on farming.

"When I got married, I had to leave my parents' cradle and build my own nest instead. I worked in a construction company and earned a meager income which was not enough for the family since we already had two children that time," explained Mang Pabie. According to him, their family encountered financial challenges which pushed them to settle in Dinagat Islands and venture into farming.

"We really experienced hardships in life the time we arrived in Dinagat Islands. What we only have is a big dream and a strong desire to survive out of farming. We build a simple hut then made of "palwa" for our shelter," Mang Pabie recalled. During those trying times, the couple used to start tilling the one-fourth hectare land rented from their neighbor and planted it with various vegetables such as ampalaya, kalabasa, talong, and other available root crops that they could think of, such as cassava, kamote, and gabij just to utilize the space in their backyard. They also raise chickens and pigs as their initial livelihood. Mang Pabie worked as hornal or a paid farm laborer at their neighbor's as a sort of work that could sustain the basic needs of their family.

On the other hand, the ever-supportive Aling Emma is always on the go. Through thick and thin, in sickness and in health, they made sure that they both face and conquer challenges together and forever. This is a concrete evidence of having all these fruits of labor they had reaped right in their own backyard. Truly love and faith made them strong along the way and these served as the foundation of their achievements.

## Healthier and wealthier

From a one-fourth rented piece of land to owning a two-hectare land today is a great achievement of Mang Pabie's family. He utilized his two-hectare farm with organically grown crops and vegetables. He allocated 0.8 hectare for their Palayamanan planted with eggplant, lady finger, cucumber, bitter melon, squash, pepper, and a lot more. Income from goat, poultry, and swine production was a big help for Mang Pabie and his family. With the assistance of Aling Emma and his children, they were able to produce vermicast and vermitea which they also use as fertilizers to their own vegetable production.

Mang Pabie believed that if there is unity, there is success and satisfaction. "Organic farming helped us a lot since the benefits in return will not only be about money but it's on health security through chemical-free farm produce. You save lives in a simple way yet fulfilling one," added Mang Pabie.



## Influencing others

As a local Farmer-Technician, Mang Pabie attended various trainings, seminars, and workshops conducted by Agricultural Training Institute (ATI) Caraga. Even schools and non-government organizations (NGOs) also invited him in any activities related to agriculture. He had been requested as a resource speaker in trainings and talk about organic agriculture. "Agricultural technicians from government and NGOs usually requested me to be a resource speaker, and I would say 'yes' as always because I know, in that way, I can share my knowledge and skills based on the experiences I have in my own farm," Mang Pabie stated.

"I'm so much thankful that I was chosen as MS in 2014 specializing in goat production", he stressed. His unique innovation, capabilities, and persistence in sustaining the production of goats that were entrusted to them as beneficiaries of the Department of Agriculture (DA) made Mang Pabie stand out among others. On the other hand,

"Without the Farmers' Information and Technology Services (FITS) Center under the Techno Gabay Program of the ATI, I may not be here talking to you as MS," he added.

Municipal Agriculturist Jo-an Gonzales said that she has no regrets in choosing Mang Pabie as MS in their area, for he is willing to share his knowledge and skills to his fellow farmers. "He can also motivate and discover farming techniques right in his own farm because farming is already in his mind and heart," she recalled.

Mang Pabie said that trainings and extension services from the ATI, opened a door of opportunities and change as he continues building his dreams to the fullest.

At this moment, the house of Mang Pabie is always open for visitors particularly to his fellow farmers who need help in acquiring skills and knowledge about organic farming for free. "The fruits of my labor are coming back to me. I'm so thankful for all the benefits I received and I gave it back to those who are needy like me before," says Mang Pabie.

In fact, he encouraged his neighbors to go organic farming and emulate his farming technologies. The humble Mang Pabie ended with this quote, "What I have now are blessings from God, and I know He made me an instrument to help and inspire others especially the less fortunate ones. It keeps going and never stop learning."

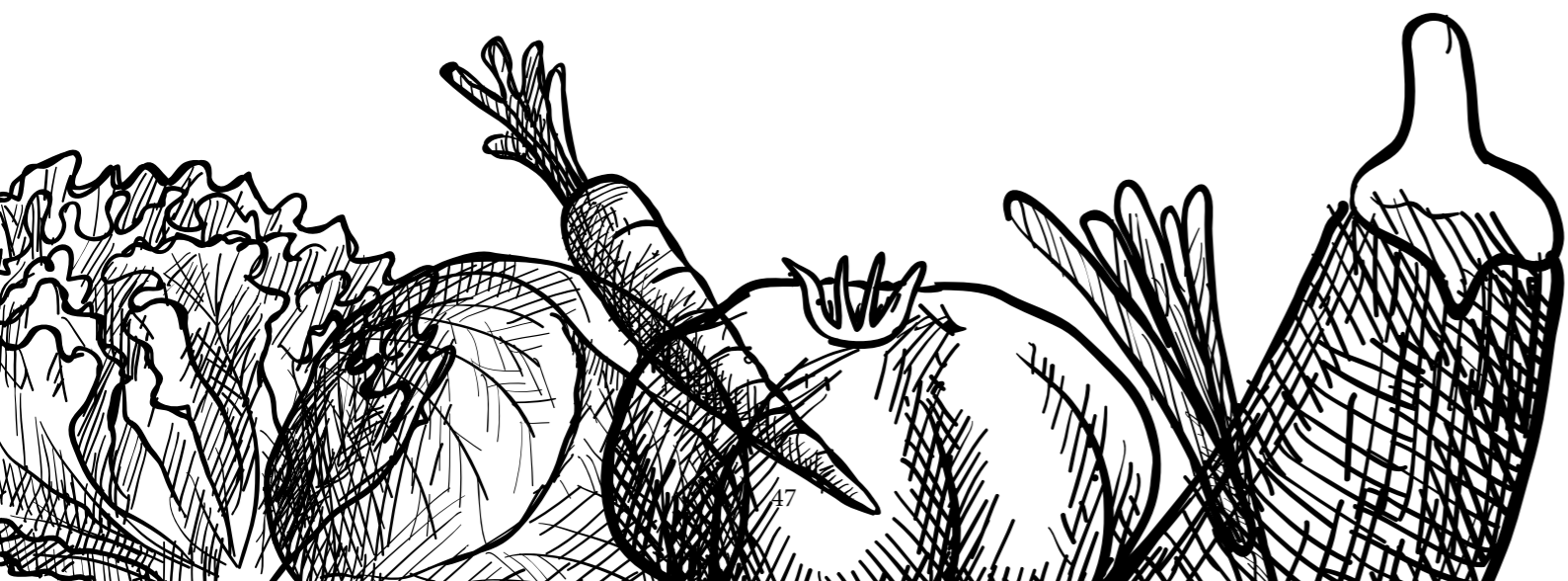


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# A Healthy and Wealthy Success

Jonaly E. Villasis

“Nothing great was ever achieved without passion. Farming is a full time job, it requires you to be a hands-on farmer. Otherwise, you won't succeed.”



A 3,383 square-meter bare and idle land inspired Enrico Mora and his wife, Jocelyn, to go into Integrated Diversified Organic Farming. They both left their good paying jobs in Manila and transferred to Barangay Nasugban, Sta. Barbara, Iloilo to pursue a healthier life. He searched ideas from books and the Internet on how to practice farming. They planted fruit-bearing trees and vegetables while also practicing the natural farming system. He also raised livestock and poultry, the natural way and realized that there's money in agriculture. To improve his farming skills, he joined the Farmers' Field School (FFS) on Palay Check System conducted by the Agricultural Training Institute (ATI) in June to October 2012. That was the beginning of the Cadagmayan Sur/Norte Nasugban and Malawog Farmers (CANAMA) Association where Enrico became the first President. Currently, the association is going strong.

## INSPIRATION

Inspired by the Palay Check System training, he rented a piece of land and practiced what he learned. His attitude showed that he is very dedicated and has the passion to be a farmer.

Enrico continued to attend other trainings to gather more ideas. In the same year, he participated in the FFS on Palayamanan held by the ATI in Region VI and the local government unit of Sta. Barbara. The topics covered palay, vegetable, and livestock production. Moreover, he rendered extension services to other farmers by sharing his knowledge and encouraging others to do the same. Enrico also offered his farm as a place of learning for others. Last January 29, 2015, the ATI funded his learning site, making him an agency partner that helps other farmers. He invested the fund in vermicomposting facilities, a poultry house, and livestock and vegetable production.

Enrico believes that "Education is a continuous process. Last March 2016, the ATI invited him to apply National Certification II, a preparatory course and assessment on organic agriculture. After becoming certified, he attended the Appreciation Course on Organic Agriculture and Internal Control System for Small Holders Groups. This generous farmer does not limit his learnings. He grabs opportunities to learn and shares with other farmers the knowledge.

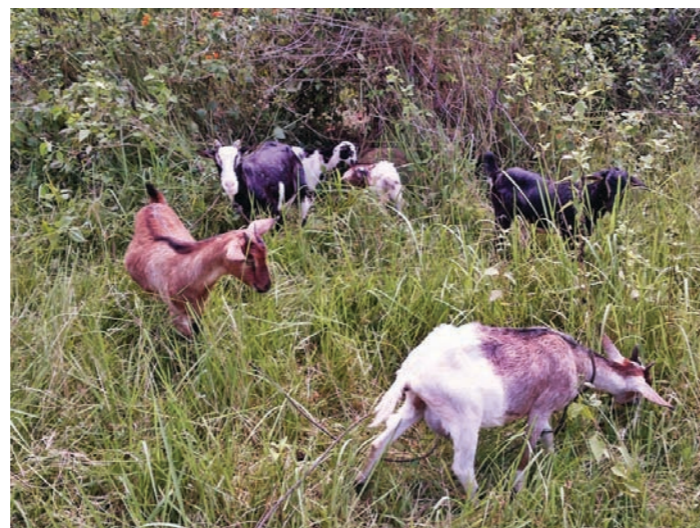
## DREAMS INTO REALITY

Currently, he practices the Natural Farming System with future plans to develop the water facility in his farm and expand to aquaculture. Enrico serves as an inspiration and the living evidence of a wealthy and healthy success. He feels that he has already achieved his goals in life, which is "To live with a healthy lifestyle while earning." He has no regrets in his decision to choose this than a high paying salary in the city.



# Prosperity in Diversity: Why Planting More Means More Money

Isagani C. Valenzuela Jr.



## Atop the hill overlooking the city of Iriga in the town of Baao lies a successful endeavor located in Barangay Caranday, Baao, Camarines Sur.

For 22 years, Noel Saniel is toiling on his five-hectare land dedicated only to rice, corn, and coconut. Despite the vastness of the property characterized by sloping and uneven terrain, productivity is stagnant and the income is not really promising.

However, things turned around in 2014 when his farm became a showcase of the Upland Palayamanan Model Farm, the component of the Upland Rice Development Program which aims to maximize land use and combat malnutrition and poverty in the community. With the project, Noel was able to diversify his products.

He introduced vegetables, herbal plants, coconut, banana, root crops, as well as livestock. He also ventured into best practices in organic farming by getting into vermiculture, natural composting, and Natural Farming Technology Systems (NFTS) production. This way he can maximize the benefits of having a natural fertilizer and herbicide which are cost-effective and, at the same time, environment-friendly.

The area devoted to rice has diminished as some parts were intercropped with peanuts. But the variety increased from one (Blonde) to five (Dinorado, Pinalawan, Kalansing, Kabiday, and Kinarawe). The cost of production also fell by almost 10 percent. The number of planted

vegetables also grew. From mere string beans and bottle gourd (upo) in 2013, there are now eggplant, pepper, tomato, okra, patola, squash, and papaya. Not to mention the fruits like banana, avocado, guava, passion fruit, and crops such as sweet potato, cassava, and peanuts. Herbal plants also proliferated like camangkao, cacao, and lagundi.

Animals roam the land, too. There are dozens of cows and goats in a confined territory to protect some crops. The chickens are free-range and they also serve as source of food as their manure is the prime ingredient for composting. Intercropping is not just limited to rice and peanuts too, since papaya are also intercropped with squash, and so are corn and string beans. With the maximization of land use, this translates to a higher income. This eventually is definitely good news for Noel, his wife and his seven children, six of whom are still in school.

This worthwhile initiative by the Agricultural Training Institute cannot be an outright success without the cooperation of the local government unit particularly the Municipal Agriculture Office. This only proves that if the national and the local agencies form a united front, the attainment of food security is not just a pipe dream.

Noel's farm is a living proof of this.



# A WALK IN JOURNEY'S FARM

Marife D. Cariño

## Journey's Farm: A paradise in a backyard

Can you imagine a paradise in your own backyard? Even with a 1,200-square-meter lot, you can transform a small area into just like the Journey's Farm.

Journey's Farm in Iba, Zambales with variety of flowers, vegetables and fruit trees; a fishpond; native pigs and chickens; and, rabbits. Owned by Joey Alvir and his family, the farm is named after the couple's fifth child—Journey.

### Walking the talk: the beginning of Journey's Farm

Joey is a 44-year old, Agriculturist II of the Office of the Provincial Agriculturist (OPA) in Zambales. He has been in the government for 22 years. Joey is the Chief of the Crops Division and also the Alternate Focal Person for Organic Agriculture in the OPA. He attended the Training of Trainers in Organic Agriculture and Training of Trainers in Integrated Diversified Farming Systems conducted by Agricultural Training Institute (ATI)-Regional Training Center (RTC) III in 2011.

As a trainer, Joey saw how the farmers accepted the techniques in organic farming and applied them in their farms while the others did not. Then he realized that to be an effective trainer and advocate in organic agriculture, he must walk the talk.

Joey decided to put up a farm to be able to convince farmers to practice farming and for them see and believe on what he preached. This is the beginning of Journey's Farm.

Joey and his family planted various vegetables applying the different organic farming techniques. Then he proposed it to become one of the ATI's Learning Sites on Integrated Diversified Farming System in 2013. The ATI provided a P60,000 worth of farm inputs: native pig, native chicken, vermicompost, and other organic inputs.

### The family that works together beats the challenge

Putting up a project like Journey's Farm while working as a trainer for the local government unit is a challenge. As a farmer, he needed to wake up early in the morning to work in his farm, then go to the office. After office work, Joey goes back to his farm to feed his livestock herd.

His family became his partners in their farm. His wife, Melody, and children: Mark Christian who waters their crops, Neil Edrian helps in planting while Joy, May, and Journey are tasked to feed their rabbits and harvest vermicast.

With the savings earned from the income of the farm, the family was able to expand the farm to 200 square meters more. This was allotted for native pig raising and mushroom production.

The Journey's Farm aims to showcase the Integrated Diversified Organic Farming Systems. Different stakeholders from other regions, farmers, enthusiasts, students, and even neighbors who are willing to go into organic farming come to visit the farm and learn from the techniques of Joey's family in maintaining an organic farm like Journey's Farm.

In 2015, he proposed a project to the ATI. The "bahay-kubo" briefing area became concrete and a nursery shed, a mushroom area, and a comfort room for visitors were constructed.

### Aiming high — Journey's Farm

As the time went by, Journey's Farm did not only become a source of income, but more importantly became a venue for bonding moments of the Alvir family.

From a mere Learning Site, the Alvir family aims to make the farm a School for Practical Agriculture of the ATI and soon as a site for Farm Tourism. With this, Joey knows that they need to enhance the farm by adding more "bahay-kubo" for the lodging of visitors who wanted to stay overnight and to cater more clients. At present, aside from organic agriculture briefing, Joey offers consultation for free.

### Creating a paradise in a backyard

Joey says that "Una, dapat nasa puso mo at masaya ka sa ginagawa mo at pangalawa, dapat ma-involve ang pamilya mo sa mga proyekto." You don't need to find paradise, you can create one on your own even in your backyard.



# Saving the world through farming naturally



Jon Ian D. Belo

Rolando Aban, most known among his friends as Lando, has been farming ever since they transferred to San Felipe, Tantaran, South Cotabato. Naturally from Pangasinan by birth from a farmer's family, Lando inherited not only his father's passion in farming and also his practices.

Their farm practices include the application of chemicals to prevent farm pest and commercial fertilizers to improve the crops capability to produce harvest. Without knowing that most of these chemicals are deemed not environment-friendly and, in the long term, may degrade the quality of human life.

To change one farmer's long-time practices into the natural way is a difficult challenge in itself. In 2010, Republic Act No. 10068 has been enacted to strengthen the promotion of organic agriculture in the country. Conventional farmers such as Lando are the target of this law.

Mainly producing rice crops was their means of livelihood in San Felipe. In 1996, however, he decided to invest in growing vegetables in his ¼-hectare land. He still used inorganic fertilizers and chemicals until recently.

Instead of continuing this old practice of applying chemicals, he shifted to organic prioritizing his health and his family's over the added money that inorganic farming can bring to their table.

Lando's decision was not abrupt, he decided on his own to pursue organic farming through a series of lessons. He became an active and firm believer of organic farming after his farm was selected by the Agricultural Training Institute to be a demonstration site of the Farmers' Field School (FFS) for the season-long training on integrated Pest Management for vegetable production.

Here, he observed the different practices employed in the FFS, taking note that the harvest of pure organic farming practice is not far behind from the inorganic practice.



## The climate of the world now continuously worsens, so we all need to do our part.

Through the FFS, he learned the many benefits of the organic way of farming. One of them is lowering the expense in farm inputs by using indigenous materials. He confidently shares with others that there are many raw materials that can be used to boost the growth of plants. They can be bought at a low price and can provide the needed plant nutrients. Most importantly, it is safe for humans, so why not take advantage of it?

One of the goals of the FFS is to help farmers discover their inner scientist by observing and experimenting to find the best practice that can be applied in their farms. Certainly, Lando found his inner scientist when he decided to go with the organic route.

During the FFS, all of participants were taught on documentation and monitoring of the growth of the plants until harvest, as well as observe what insects are present, whether they are beneficial or harmful. Though the activity concluded in September 2015, he continued to practice what he learned.

After knowing the different techniques and technologies during the conduct of the FFS, he stopped using chemicals in his farm. Instead of spraying pesticides, he uses Oriental Herbal Nutrients. To promote the growth of the plant, he uses Fermented Plant Juice. He uses vermicast as basal. All of these can be safely acquired at home, using indigenous materials through fermentation and use of African Night Crawler.

As he has started to convert his farm, nearby farmers still ridiculed him, stating that it wouldn't be sustainable and that he would still go back to the his conventional ways. Just like the prodigal son who returned to his father after difficult times. He was met with criticism, "Diak kita, diak pati." (I don't believe unless I see), they would say. But remaining firm in his belief, he pushed on forward. Disregarding their remarks, keeping on practicing organic, and believing that what he does is the right way for every farmer.

Whenever he had a chance, he would gladly invite other farmers to his farm stating that, "My farm is open for you to see. All that I have in terms of knowledge, I will gladly share with you."

Lando has delayed planting for now, due to the scorching heat brought by El Niño. However, come rainy season, when the land's thirst is quenched by rain drops, he will undoubtedly start anew and make use of his knowledge on organic agriculture.

The climate of the world now continuously worsens, so we all need to do our part. For farmers, one way of saving the world for future generations is to go back to the natural ways of farming, doing away with chemical and hazardous agricultural inputs. The world needs more people like Lando to change their old practices and decide to change for the better.





# Genes Estialbo:

## Mother of Organic and Natural Farming in Dao, Capiz

Jaana G. Tamayo

The question of whether to go organic or not wasn't much of a choice for Genes Estialbo, a retired agricultural technologist and now a staunch organic advocate. After her daughter and husband died from diseases attributed to unhealthy lifestyle, she now devotes her entire life to organic farming to ensure safe and healthy food for her precious grandchildren and loved ones.



### The Barren Land

In 2000, Genes and her husband, Pat, bought a 5,000-square-meter lot in Barangay Matagnop, Dao, Capiz to make it a model farm for organic food production. They dreamt of a new home where they can live safely and eat healthy, naturally grown food.

The couple had worked as agricultural technologists for the municipality and, for decades, encouraged farmers to do conventional farming. Realizing the adverse effects of chemicals, they decided to teach farmers a better alternative – the natural farming system.

Acquiring the land was the first step to fulfill their mission. Unfortunately, two years later, Pat died of myocardial infraction. "My husband was a very industrious farmer but he was sickly," Genes recalls. "He used chemical spray and left the empty containers within the vicinity of our home. He suffered from high blood pressure, goiter, and even diabetes. At the age of 54, he passed away. That pushed me to get rid of all chemicals as much as possible to keep my family safe," Genes says.

Pat's legacy and burning desire for natural and organic farming lived on in Genes. Even without a partner, she remained true to their dream: to develop the 5,000 sq. m. barren land until it was lush with fruits and vegetables. "Di mo kakayanin yan," her neighbors would say, for true enough nothing grew but tall grass and weeds. However, Genes did not worry knowing that the very solution was right under her nose.

"Sabi ko sa kanila it's a matter of tiyaga at sipag lang talaga. Makakaya ko dahil meroon na akong alam na technology which is natural and organic farming," she says.

Both her parents lived a long life, however, they had frequently been ill. This, she also believes, might have been caused by the Green Revolution in the 70's which promoted high yields by the use of chemicals but posed threats to health.

"Chemical farm inputs are harmful to health and the environment," she says. "In organic farming, the concept is to restore soil fertility, and in return, the soil will give you good results."

### Bahay Kubo: The Conceptualization of Charity Nature Farm

The family planted madre de cacao to fence the area. The plant is a rich source of nitrogen which could help restore soil fertility. They planted fruit trees like santol, durian, rambutan, mango, coconut, bamboo, and forest trees on the 2,000-square-meter area while the rest was used for home lot and small scale rice and vegetable production.

All went well for Genes and her family. They were happy and their dream slowly became a reality. She would spend weekends in the garden with her daughter, Charity, where they would jest about building a bahay kubo (nipa hut) and plant all the 18 vegetables in the Filipino nursery song.

"Si Charity, my third child, encouraged me na magpatayo ng kubo dito," she recalls. "Kung 'di lahat ng vegetables ay at most 90 percent ng nasa song ay natanim na namin sa area at that time."

"Kaya lang pagka-graduate niya, nagpunta siyang Laguna at doon ay nakahanap ng trabaho sa isang company ng noodles. After three months, umuwi siya dito dahil nagkasakit. Wala daw kasing protective gear 'pag nagtatanggal sila ng expired ingredients. Nilalagnat siya pero ayaw talaga bumaba yung fever niya kahit ano ang gawin ng doctor. Pumunta kami ng Roxas, Iloilo, at kahit St. Luke's-Manila kaya lang ganun pa rin ang naging resulta. Nagdecide nalang kaming umuwi as advised by the doctor na pakainin siya ng kulitis (spinach), mga native na gulay at mag pain relievers na lang."

"Namatay rin si Charity pero yung ginawa naming dalawa, hindi ko makakalimutan kaya ipinangalan ko sa kanya ang Charity Nature's Farm. Siya kasi yung nagbigay sa akin ng lakas upang magpatuloy sa buhay," Genes says as she wiped her tears.

Charity was not able to see the bahay kubo that her Nanay Genes built. She would have been proud how far Genes had gone. As Charity Nature's Farm blossomed in Genes' care, it has grown to be among the best learning venues for organic farming that radiated throughout and even outside of Dao.

### A New Partner

Genes found a new partner in the local government unit (LGU) of Dao to support her advocacy upon the approval of the Organic Agriculture (OA) Act of 2010. With growing concern over the intensive use of chemicals, the Dao Organic Agriculture Program evolved with Genes and the LGU, thru the Office of the Municipal Agriculturist, in the front line.

Genes worked closely with Susan Dordas, OA Focal Person and Farmers' Information Technology Services (FITS) Center Manager to test and improve the system. The aim was to promote sustainable agriculture with Natural Farming Technology, establish household level organic agriculture, and increase consumer awareness on the benefits of natural and organic food.

"The Integrated Diversified Organic Farming System (IDOFS) Learning Site of Genes funded by the Agricultural Training Institute (ATI) is a major highlight of the program. It serves as a model site for organic agriculture in the province of Capiz," Susan relates.

Together, they established the techno demo farm for organic rice and vegetable production, sustained the Food Always in the Home (FAITH) and the Gulayan sa Paaralan initiatives, upscaled the bio organic industry in Dao, established the IDOFS learning site, trained thousands of farmers in IDOFS, gained LGU legislative support like the DOAP and the creation of the municipal technical committee, developed various information materials, and even institutionalized the annual farmers' day celebration where organic products are showcased to increase consumer awareness.

"In 2012, Genes retired as agricultural technologist from the Dao LGU, leaving a lifetime legacy in the hearts of thousands of farmers. We consider her as the Mother of Natural Farming in Dao, and that was how we were able to get the support of the LGU to spread out to farmers the benefits of using organic farm inputs," Susan added. Among those she inspired were Edu Corcino, a producer of black rice in Dao; Rogine Callar, a teacher who initiated the Gulayan sa Paaralan in Malonoy High School and in turn inspired students to love farming; and even Susan Dordas herself. "Kami ni 'Nang Genes ang nag conceptualize ng Dao Organic Agriculture Program and with the support of the local government, the DOAP was launched. Our main goal is to provide safe and nutritious food to the general public," Susan says.

Dao bagged the regional awards for the most outstanding LGU and Focal Person in Organic Agriculture in Region VI. They were also endorsed as the official entry of Western Visayas for the national level where they won P1 million. "We used the money for organic agriculture projects which benefitted 38 OA practitioners. They also gave a P30,000 incentive for the focal person which we likewise used for the projects," Susan shares.

### Malonoy High School Gulayan sa Paaralan

"Si Ma'am Gene ay isa sa aking mga personal consultants," Gulayan sa Paaralan Manager Rogine Callar relates. "At kung ano ang makita ko sa kanyang garden ay ina-adopt ko rin katulad ng vermi-composting. Sa kanya ko nakuha ang mga African Night Crawlers at, sa feeds preparation, siya rin ang aking gabay kung tama nga ba ang aking ginagawa," Rogine says.

Malonoy High School Gulayan sa Paaralan engaged not only in vegetable production but fruit trees, too. They also have a fish pond for hito, organic swine, chicken and ducks, and bananas. They have even expanded into lowland and upland organic rice production and now sell products to local consumers but, most importantly, they were able to address malnutrition among their students by encouraging the to plant and eat vegetables and to get involved in agriculture.

"Malaki talaga ang naitulong ng vermi-composting at natural composting lalo na sa estudyante dahil kumikita sila and learn at the same time. Lahat ng kanilang mga tinatanim na herbs kagaya ng stevia, mint, tarragon, basil, at blue ternate ay ginagamit sa welcome beverage sa mga bisita na bumibili na rin ng mga ito," Rogine adds.

"Natutuwa nga ako dahil natuto na rin ang mga bata ng entrepreneurship. Di lamang sila involved sa crop production, pati na rin sa paggawa ng mga concoction kagaya ng Indigenous Micro Organisms (IMO) na ginagamit para mawala ang mabahong amoy sa tirahan ng mga baboy at manok. Sa katunayan, malaki talaga ang naitulong ng learning site sa pagpapalago ng organic farming sa Magtanop," he further explains.



## Organic Black Rice

"Classmates kami ni Genes noong college and mukhang forever pa rin kaming magiging magkaklase dahil sa patuloy naming pag-aaral sa organic," muses Edu Corcino, one of the many organic practitioners in Dao inspired by Genes. "Siya ang nag-encourage sa akin na magtanim ng organic rice at sa tulong din ni Susan Dordas, ay nakumbinsi akong mag-organic."

"Gumagawa na rin ako ng mga concoction at maganda talaga ang epekto sa palay, lalo na ang IMO. Dark green ang kulay at mas resistant sa sakit. Ginagamit ko rin ang IMO sa mga manok at hinahalo ko sa kanilang inumin. Kung mayroong 15 sisiw ang isang manok, isa lang ang namamatay as compared doon sa isang brood na hindi ko ginamitan na lima na lang ang natiral!" Edu shares.

"Si Genes ang nag introduce at nagturo sa akin sa OA. Sinusunod ko ang mga advice niya kasi ang mahal ng abono. Sa organic, konti nga lang ang kita pero konti din ang gastos kung ikumpara sa conventional. Kaunti lang kailangan mong bilhin na ingredients kasi sa paligid lang ang kailangan mo sa paggawa ng bokashi," Edu explains.

Bokashi is an organic fertilizer made from animal manure, rice bran, and carbonized rice hull mixed with IMO, fermented plant juice (FPJ), and Oriental Herbal Nutrients (OHN). The microorganisms, when mixed with the soil, make plants grow healthier by facilitating the absorption of nutrients. It's all natural.

"Diyan tayo kasi nagkakasakit sa paggamit ng conventional na insecticide, herbicide, at fertilizer," Edu says. "Sa ngayon, naka-focus ako sa pagtanim ng organic black rice dahil konsumo din ng pamilya ko at na-notice ko na hindi na sila gaanong nagkakasakit. Ngayon kinukulang na talaga ang 70 cavans na produce ko. Wala kasi itong spray, IMO lang ginagamit ko at maganda naman kasi talaga ang epekto. Kaya nga gusto ko mag-convert fully into organic," Edu shares.

## Surviving Yolanda

Charity Natures Farm was severely damaged by super typhoon Yolanda (international codename Haiyan) and, with a heavy heart, Genes had to close it down. However, after a while, she decided to revive it. "Iba talaga yung may capacity, strength, inspiration, at positive thinking because life must go on. Kahit namatay man ang asawa ko't anak, I still have my two other children and four grandchildren. Gusto ko lang talaga makatulong sa ibang farmers na baguhin ang kanilang pagtatanim," Genes shares.

"Yung initial na binigay sa akin ng ATI na ginamit ko magpatayo ng training center and production center, yung native chicken at babuyang walang amoy. Nawala lahat ng inumpisahan ko gawa ng Bagyong Yolanda. Pati rin yung kinita ko sa trainings na higit-kumulang P70,000 to P100,000 at pati pa yung ibang part ng retirement ko, lahat yun," Genes sadly recalls.

"Binigyan ako ng mga screen, plastic, flower pots, at garden tools para ma-revive ang Farm. Ayaw ko na sana because I will go back to zero. Yung naiwan na lang talaga is my passion for organic. Wala na yung mga halaman, lahat wala na. Mabuti na lang may ATI na nagbigay ng lakas loob sa akin."

"Nakapagbigay din yung Department of Agriculture ng P75,000 para sa swine. At least ngayon, mabuti na. Kung sum up ko, hindi na ako zero. Andyan na ako sa 60 to 70 percent recovery. Basta ang passion at energy ko nandiyan pa rin kasi organic yung kinakain ko, organic lahat! Hanggang yung kaisipan ko at kahit ang puso, organic din," she gladly states.

Meanwhile, Susan shares her support for Genes and her projects, "Isa ang learning site sa nagsilbing inspiration na anything is possible. Kahit maliit lang ang space, magkakapera pa rin talaga. Usually kasi with farmers, to see is to believe. When we promote a project or program, we need to show it to them. Advocating the program was not easy. We had to encourage them to go back to natural farming. It was a slow process from the 38 farmers that adopted to

organic farming, there are now about 40 of us." There are now three new projects for Dao. The farmers are currently training for System Rice Intensification (SRI) in partnership with SRI Pilipinas and iRelief Foundation. It is a low water, labor-intensive, organic production method aimed at increasing the yield of rice produced. iRelief has even partnered with Genes to make her site a demo farm for SRI along with three other sites in Matagnop.

"We are also into agri-herbal tourism kung saan ang Dao ang magiging agri-herbal tourism capital for Capiz since dito nagsimula ang organic. Some women farmers have already started planting herbs," Susan recounts. "Kung totooan lang nila ang pagtatanim, they can even earn more as compared to rice. Mint for example sells at P40 per kilo, and sells at P350 when dried," she adds.

"We are not only for production but consumer awareness as well. We inform them of the health benefits of organic farming. The LGU has signed a pledge of commitment for all consumers to support the program and has even limited farm chemical companies from promoting their products," Susan shares. "Sana nga lang ay magkaroon na din ng marketing support like trading post para doon pumunta ang consumers."

## Life's Purpose

"God gave me the gift of life so I will share it with others. This is my life's purpose. I share my knowledge and experience with everyone without reservation. Even my grandchildren are now learning about gardening," LGU Dao's Mother of Organic Farming proudly shares.

"To our future farmers, who are the hope of our nation, I encourage you to take care of our environment. Refrain from using chemical fertilizers and pesticides and take care of our soil because it is our source of life. There may be doctors, teachers, and lawyers, but farmers are responsible for growing their food. Produce safe and chemical free food. There is money in farming but, above all, our health is our wealth," Genes concludes.



# Leading by Example: The Story of COJORAN Farm Owners

Jaila S. Sagpa-ey

"It is not just tilling the soil or planting seeds, but also taking into account the healthy relationship of agriculture to environment, health and more so the mind set of farmers."

## Their Conviction

Why did you engage in this endeavor? This was the very first question asked to Connie Sotero about their organic farm. She smiled and said with conviction, "For us to show that what we are advocating for is real and doable".

Being public servants in the agriculture sector, Connie and, her husband, Jeffrey were exposed to different kinds of attitude, including the dreaded "to see is to believe" mentality of some farmers. The couple wanted to conquer this mentality and prove that organic agriculture is really more beneficial than chemical-based farming, and that their advocacy is not just lip service.

For Jeff, this was a big challenge. Being the Municipal Agriculturist of Tublay, he must take the lead in pursuing their office's vision of having a progressive and food sufficient municipality that practices organic farming.

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## The Establishment Period

The couple then persevered to establish their own organic farm to set an example in their locality and more importantly to ensure nutritious and safe food for their family. Since both of them came from a farming family, they used their knowledge and skills acquired from childhood and from the various local and overseas trainings they have attended from the Agricultural Training Institute (ATI) and through the Young Filipino Farmers Training Program in Japan. The couple developed their farm in 2011.

During the early days of establishment, Connie admitted that there came a point that the task became burdensome for them. Financial constraint was their ultimate struggle. Determined to finish what they started, the couple availed themselves of personal loans to augment their financial needs. Eventually, portion by portion, the land was transformed into an organic farm.

## Their Struggles and their Values

2 The passion and commitment of the couple for the advocacy and practice of organic farming won over all limiting factors in their operation such as time, funds, and other resources.

The couple persevered to compensate the time devoted for government service. Farm work was usually done before and after office hours, and during weekends and holidays, and sometimes even extending until night time.

Criticisms from few conventional farmers sometimes weakened the hearts of the couple but they remained optimistic and focused, keeping in mind the reasons why they established the farm in the first place. They adopted the battle cry "No retreat, no surrender!"

The couple used the power of networking to their advantage. Financial constraints were surmounted by tapping government support through the Tublay Organic Farming Practitioners Association (TOFPA) where Connie is an active member. For facilities, the Department of Agriculture in Cordillera Administrative Region (DA-CAR) provided some materials for the greenhouse construction such as pipes for frames, nets, and plastic sheets.

With the existing facilities and equipment, ATI-CAR approved their proposal on 'Upscaling Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) Certified Organic Farm into Learning Site' in 2015. An amount of P150,000 was released to them in January 2016 which they used mainly to fund the construction of a holding area.

## The Need for Certification

Aware of the need to undergo certification as organic farm, they completed the four phases of Internal Control Systems installation together with the members of the TOFPA with assistance from the ATI-CAR. They applied for the Organic Certification of the COJORAN Farm. In 2014, while waiting for the result of the certification, they also took the opportunity to subject their farm for GAP certification. The process of GAP certification was indeed difficult but they steadfastly followed the processes and submitted the necessary documents. Finally, after almost a year of preparation and waiting, the farm received its PhilGAP certification in April 2015.

## The Farm Today

Named after the owners, COJORAN stands for Connie and Jeff Organically Responsive to Agriculture and Nature.

As a place for learning, the farm showcases the use of wind breaks and buffer plants like tricastera, tuel tree, callandra, and banana to help protect the crops from wind damage as well as chemical contaminants. Plants were labeled with their common name for the visitors and improvised insect traps were installed in the greenhouses. The farm has also its own nursery, composting area, concoction area, washing area, and packing area strategically located based on the standards. The couple also put up a water storage system that taps from a clean source, a must for a farm like theirs.

With the facilities in place, availability of local materials, coupled with their technical expertise, Connie and Jeff started producing their own organic fertilizers. They use compost (from biodegradable wastes of the farm) and liquid fertilizer such as fermented honeycomb, eggshells mixed with "Mokusaku" or wood vinegar, and molasses. They established their own "Mokusaku" facility near their residence.

Likewise, they established the market for their produce in front of Tublay municipal building every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday and at the Benguet Provincial Capitol every 15th and 30th of the month through TOFPA.

To maintain the area, they hired an employee for the day-to-day activities in the farm. Farm recording is very important, so daily activities were noted. They also hired additional workers for weeding and other major farm activities on a daily basis locally called as 'puldya'. Aside from these, the couple always takes the opportunity to do farm work with their children on weekends or during their free time.



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## The Farm as Learning Site

The farm is now one of the learning sites being promoted by ATI-CAR and DA-CAR among farmers from various places. Fellow farmers from the area also take time to visit and inquire of their farm practices. Connie and Jeff confidently share their knowledge and experiences of having a PhilGAP certified organic farm. The couple is now being invited as resource persons at organic agriculture-related activities of the ATI-CAR and the Benguet Office of Provincial Agriculture.

Students would also conduct research in the area, specifically on the evaluation of the different concoctions that are applied in the farm.

4

## The Fruits of their Labor

According to the couple, the present income from their farm is almost comparable with what they are receiving as government workers. More importantly, they are happy and proud producing safe food products for their family and for other consumers. They have established a concrete model farm where they can share both organic and GAP systems of farming to farmers and other stakeholders and probably break the "to see is to believe" mentality.

According to Jeff, their advocacy and practice of organic farming gave them a more meaningful perspective about farming. It is not just tilling the soil or planting seeds, but also taking into account the healthy relationship between agriculture and the environment, health and the mind set of farmers. According to the couple, they feel fulfilled whenever they get the opportunity to educate individuals on their advocacy.

As the term Cojoran literally means "a pulling place" in Ibaloi, the farm will continuously evolve so that, like a powerful magnetic force, it will "pull" or influence others to go into good and safe farming.



## Canaan Hills Farm and Honey Garden: AgriTourism Destination in Biliran

Jonalyn G. Saulan

Parents mold their children to become a better version of themselves. It is common among farmer parents to advise their children: "Mag-aral kang mabuti, para hindi ka magsaka ng bukid." This holds true to most of our farmers in the country. As much as they can, they do not want their children to experience the hardship and struggles cultivating land for a living.

1

For a family in Brgy. Uson, Caibiran, Biliran, parents Eduardo and Priscilla Espinazo are grateful that their children helped realize their dream to have a farm of their own. They sent their children to school; Jeruel and Jeffrey are now faculty members at Naval State University; Lemuel is a veterinarian; Jemmel stopped being a seaman to help in fishing and farming, while Sandro, Samuel, Sandra, Jemima and Jacamia returned home to cultivate the land their parents were able to acquire—all nine helps at the farm in their own ways. They manage Canaan Hills Farm and Honey Garden, an agritourism destination in Caibiran, Biliran.

It is almost a 6-hectare uphill lot overlooking the east coast of Biliran province. The farm is named after the biblical term Canaan or promise land. Espinazo matriarch, Priscilla, shares "Gisaad na sa Ginoo nga ang iyang mga tawo magmtinud-anon sa pagsunod ug pag-alagad kaniya. Iyang gisugo ang mga katawhan niya nga pangadto kamo niini nga yuta nga akong gisaad kaninyo, diin adtua nagapagaay sa gatas ug dugos." In the bible, this can be seen on Leviticus 20:24 which states, "You will possess their land; I will give it to you as an inheritance, a land flowing with milk and honey."



2

## No lot, no problem

The family's main source of livelihood is fishing and farming. Eduardo started farming on borrowed vacant lots, where he would plant banana, or rootcrops. Often, when the owner will eventually need the land, he is left with nothing but the drive to look for another vacant lot. He did this while raising their children, until the couple were able to save up, and invest on fishing gears then started to save again from both means.

In October 2011, a land owner was willing to sell her unproductive property to the Espinazo family. They didn't have the required amount back then, and both parties agreed on a payment term: The family will pay in full by December 2013, and if they can't, the land will be returned along with another prospective buyer.

Even while they were still in the process of paying it in full, the sons already started cultivating the land. In December 2013, the family was able to pay the full amount. Priscilla relates that her children are the main workers in the farm.

They started cultivating the land portion by portion, or as they call it—strips. One strip will be cleaned, cultivated and planted with fruit trees, until they reached the topmost part of the area. This grew until they started to put in ornamentals and landscaping.

The family did not have a specific farm plan. Rather, they planted fruit trees and followed the appropriate distance for each kind. They intentionally planted vegetables so they can be sure on the safety of the food that they consume. As such, they only use organic practices and their main source of fertilizer comes from sheep, where the shed is purposely constructed to separate the urine and manure. Sheep urine flows into a drum, while the manure is manually collected.



They intentionally planted vegetables so they can be sure on the safety of the food that they consume.

## Family comes out for each other

Indeed, maintenance use up most of their time. With limited resources for farm development, they could not hire laborers since a large part of the income will go to daily wages. This made the Espinazo children decide to devote their time in the farm. As further developments took place, family members who had other jobs outside the farm would pledge to sustain the farm expenses.

As the family advocates natural farming technologies, they cleaned the whole area by hand and not kaingin. Hence, the farm mainly involves family members including the grandchildren. They are molding the kids at an early age on the positive effects of farming and eating their own produce.

When the two consecutive supertyphoons visited Region VIII in 2013 and 2014, Canaan had less damages. Fruit trees were then small during the former and they were able to put wood braces for the trunks a week before the latter made a landfall. There weren't much effect on the coconut trees at the farm, since it has been eliminated to give way for the vast landscaping.

The farm has a 10 x 10 meters cylindrical water reservoir, connected by a hose from a nearby spring that is used for all the activities especially at the topmost part. At one point, the water reservoir dried up due to El Niño. Thus, they had to manually water the plants until 11 PM using the water source at the entrance. This meant carrying the barrel with water uphill, and rolling it downhill. Sandro, the eldest son, relates that it was one of the biggest challenge they faced at the farm by far.

At one point, the water reservoir dried up due to El Niño. Thus, they had to manually water the plants until 11 PM using the water source at the entrance. This meant carrying the barrel with water uphill, and rolling it downhill.

3

## Mixing to get the balance

The farm gets an average of 200 visitors per month, although there are times when visitors can go as high as 200 in a day, especially on holidays. However, they emphasized that they close the farm on Sundays for worship. Visitors can tour the farm the whole day for a twenty-peso (P20) entrance fee.

Samuel notes on people's comments, "Maupay an iyo farm, makarefresh iton amon huna-huna kun nasulod kami tungod han iyo way of farming nga dili la basta, iyo gin-arrange an iyo pagtanom." (Your farm is a good site, as it refreshes our thoughts because of your farming strategy. You did not just planted; the plants are well arranged.)

Until such time that they needed more people for farming and entertaining visitors, the family decided to temporarily close it for walk-in guests. They felt the need to study on controlling the flow of visitors without neglecting their farming activities.

Samuel shares, "An tawo man gud, makuri pagmanage, so nagdecide kami nga i-close anay temporarily para an masakob, diri masamukan kay an mga tanom nadeastroso na liwat. Nangalimtan na usahay an pag-uma kay nahingadi na an focus sa mga bisita." (People tend to be unmanageable especially with the large area, and very limited personnel. The plants were also destroyed in the long run. Sometimes, the family's focus is already diverted to entertaining the visitors rather than farming.)

Little by little, with the pledges from family members and from the farm income, Canaan now has a function hall, stop-over cottages, vegetable structures, vermicomposting facility and a tractor service for guests. The farm now feature strips of land with Jackfruit, Lemonsito, Cacao, Rambutan, Mango, Papaya, Coconut, Miracle fruit and ornamentals to name a few. It has a total of 23 kinds of fruit bearing trees.

On their part, the family was firm that they are not after the income that visitors put in, but on the true meaning of sharing their farming strategies to the public.



The Espinazo couple gives the credit to their nine children for creating the paradise that they now enjoy and able to share with others as well.

4

The family's matriarch received the UGMAD award on August 11, 2015 as Outstanding Farmer-Entrepreneur presented by Visayas State University during its founding anniversary.

On the last quarter of 2015, ATI RTC VIII identified Canaan Hills Farm and Honey Garden as a learning site for the farmers in the region. The farm, represented by Samuel Espinazo, received P100,000 to fund their proposal on a protected structure facility that will be used for cauliflower production.

Samuel shared that their dream is to make Canaan a model farm and encourage others to go into farming. They hope to re-open again soon, with a better strategy for a balanced farming and tourism. Consequently, they wanted to get their vermicomposting facility to be fully operational and implement technologies from successful farms they visited.

With only four years of farming and cultivating the land, they have done so much. None of the family members claim owning the land. Instead, they claim as caretakers and acknowledges God as the sole owner. Thus, they emphasized the need to take care of it.

When the former owner knew that the farm has become what it is now, she regained her interest on the land and proposed a buy back. Apparently, there was nobody she can trust to maintain the farm as an agritourism destination.

The Espinazo couple gives the credit to their nine children for creating the paradise that they now enjoy and able to share with others as well.

## When it rains, it pours.

# Jumping with Agtalon

Mafel Myda Y. Gonzales

As people nowadays are changing their lifestyle habits, there's also an increase in the consumption of organic products. These products may have higher prices than the inorganic ones, but it does not bother some people as they believe that it costs more to be sick. This is also the advocacy of Victoria Padilla, founder and Executive Director of the Agro-Technical Assistance and Livelihood Opportunities in the North (Agtalon) Inc. is one of the accredited Extension Service Providers (ESPs) of the Agricultural Training Institute (ATI) in Region I since 2012.

Founded in 1987, Agtalon has lecturers and faculty on call from the University of the Philippines-Los Baños, Benguet State University, and other nearby colleges who are experts in their programs. They hold training activities on organic agriculture, crop production and internal control system from 2013 to 2015 with the ATI Regional Office as partners in extension delivery.

Agtalon is advocating 'slow food' in contrast to fast food and initiated the construction of an Organic Agriculture Trading Post in Manaoag. With her advocacy in slow food, Padilla adds, "We are promoting good, clean, fair, and healthy food."

According to Maricel Carino, Agtalon's Management Staff, within its three-year partnership with the ATI, Agtalon has reached

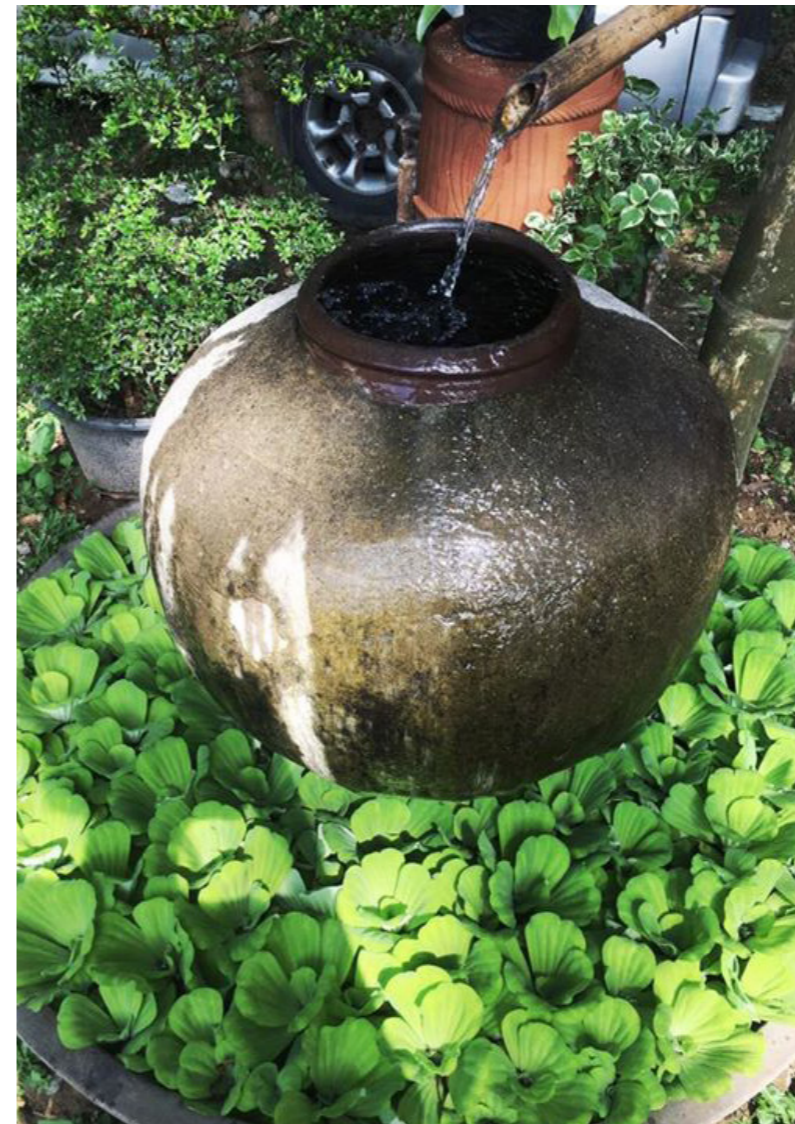
not only the private sector but also the government, thus paving the way to achieve its goals to promote sustainable agriculture and healthy lifestyle. It has conducted a total of 35 trainings on organic agriculture and was able to reach 914 participants composed of agricultural extension workers (AEWs), farmers, indigenous people (IP), consumers, and youth.

Agtalon also experienced struggles in their finances that affected their pursuit of their goals and mission. However, they have resolved this by venturing into other income-generating activities which involved developing, processing, and marketing of products from farmer-cooperators especially their most in-demand product, the organic rice.

The 1.6-hectare demonstration farm owned by the organization is now being renovated for upgrading. They have rice, corn, vegetables, hogs, and chickens being grown in their farm. The farm also has training facilities that can accommodate more than 50 people.

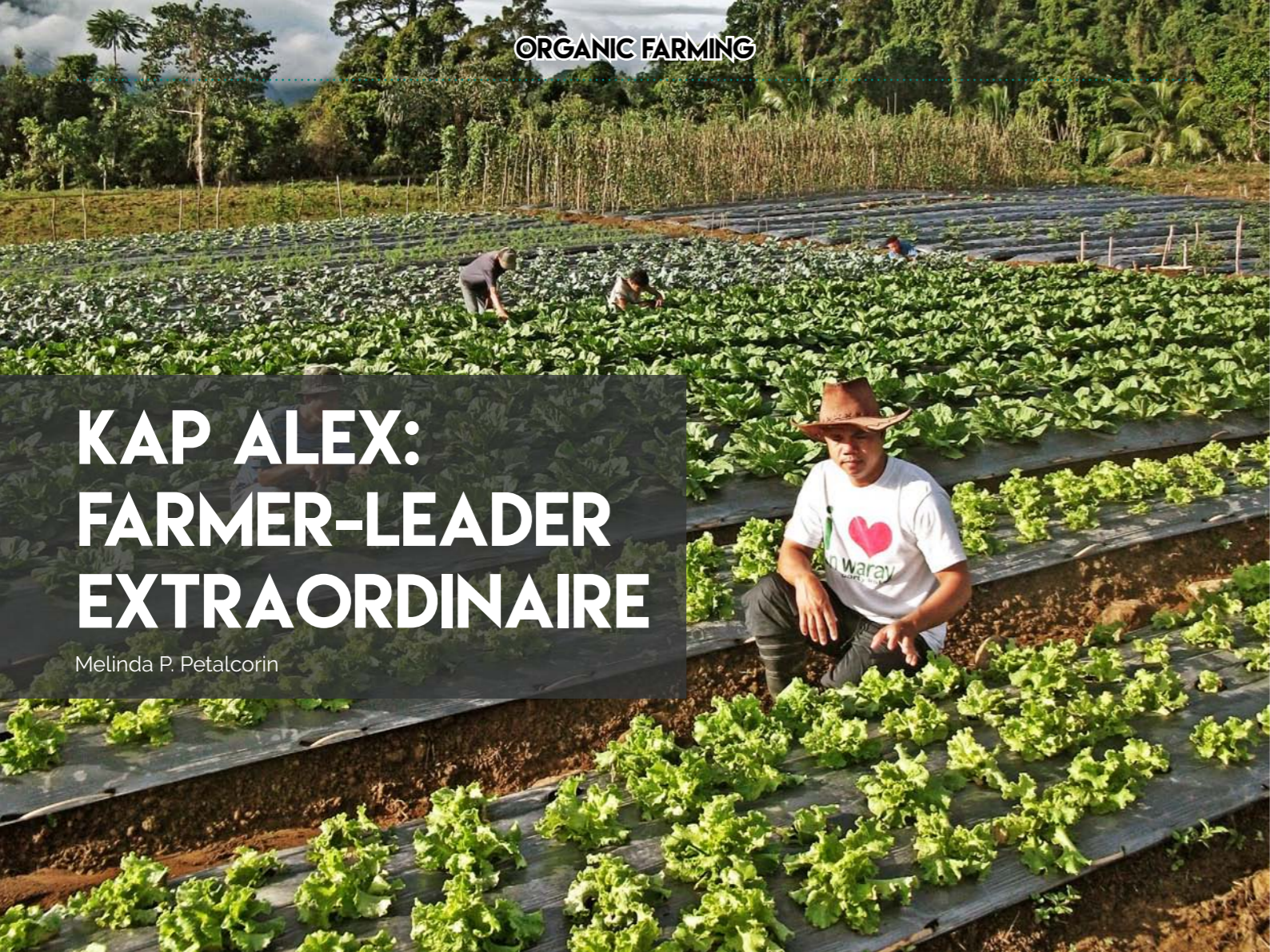
Padilla stressed that the ATI's unwavering support helped Agtalon push its advocacy on organic agriculture and paved the way for them to reach out and share their knowledge and experiences.

When asked about Agtalon's future plans, Padilla shares, "As ATI's partner in the organic agriculture advocacy, Agtalon will be focusing on the promotion of organic farming, enhancing our organic demo and training farm as learning center, and continuing marketing activities in our Organic Trading Post."



# KAP ALEX: FARMER-LEADER EXTRAORDINAIRE

Melinda P. Petalcorin



There are many farmer-leaders in the country but only a few can be considered extraordinary. Only a few can claim to be the embodiment of such a title. Add Alex Aborita to that list.

When people think of having a successful life, it would almost always be for their own families. Planning for the good life of one's family is hard enough, but to do that for the whole community is something else. This is what sets the 40-year old Alex Aborita or Kap Alex a cut above the rest. He wanted to be successful in farming for the sake of his family and the whole of Brgy. Villaconzoilo in Jaro, Leyte.

### Successful farmer-leader in the making

He started his foray into farming early in life. The eldest of 13 children, he often went to work in the field with his father. This practice made him see the promise in tilling the land. Kap Alex's passion for agriculture prodded him to go to school with the intention of going into farming full-time afterwards. He finished a degree in Bachelor of Agricultural Technology from the Visayas State University, Alangalang campus in 1996. From thereon, there was no stopping this determined man.

Being Leyte's Outstanding Young Farmer in 1996, he was included in the Young Filipino Farmers Training Program in Japan (YFFTPJ). While there, he also participated in the

ASEAN Young Farmer Leaders Training Program. The stint in Japan increased Kap Alex's drive to promote agriculture. Having lived in Barangay. Villaconzoilo all his life, Kap Alex dreamed big for his community. He ventured into politics and became a barangay councilor. Later on, he became the 3-term barangay captain. He saw these positions in the barangay as his opportunity to share the knowledge and technologies he learned to create a sustainable livelihood for the people. Perhaps it was easy for the people of Villaconzoilo to put their trust in Kap Alex for he had set a good example to them.

Awards continued to pour in for the young farmer as people took notice of his success and that of his community. These included the Regional Gawad Saka finalist (2012), Outstanding Vegetable Farmer (2014), and one of the Top 10 Outstanding Young Farmers of the Philippines (2014) of the Junior Jaycees.

### Organizing for community success

Brgy. Villaconzoilo is the last upland barangay of Jaro, Leyte. Kap Alex smiles as he describes it, "We are the last frontier here. BThat is why progress was slow in coming to the barangay.

There used to be problems here on peace and order. This community also needed a sustainable livelihood." The community relies mostly on agriculture as 70% of its residents are into farming.

Kap Alex explains, "The whole farm is divided into sections. Different members take care of each section by planting diverse crops at specified intervals. This way, we can harvest crop(s) almost every month. The members pay back the cost of the seeds the association has provided them plus a certain percentage after they have sold their harvest."

Kap Alex's approach to his farming is a healthy mix of practicality and all that he has learned from school and other established organic agriculture practitioners. One senses this as he explains why certain technologies or crops are not grown in the farm. He reckons that they need to focus on what can be feasibly grown in the farm which also has a high demand in the market. Take for example his use of tomato cuttings instead of seeds. This allowed them to save money for other farm inputs. When he perfected the technology, he suggested they use it in the farm.

Aside from crops, Villaconzoilo Community Association (VILCOA) has integrated into their farming system a 136-head piggery. Kap Alex says, "Although the vegetables are 100% organic, our piggery is still 75% organic since we still add commercially-bought feeds. Hopefully, we can go organic once we are able to establish our own source of corn. By then, we will be producing our own feed mix." The farm also has ponds where they grow red and black tilapia.

VILCOA markets its produce in Jaro, its neighboring towns, and in the cities of Tacloban and Ormoc. They supply the Fresh Depot of Robinson's Place Tacloban with salad vegetables. Early this year, VILCOA signed a MOA with the Max's Group of Companies to supply their chain of restaurants in the region with vegetables. Should the supplies be enough, there is a possibility of distributing the produce to Max's Cebu or Manila.

### Group struggles

Like other farmer's associations, VILCOA also experienced problems. The most damaging of which was brought by the super typhoon Yolanda. Just as their hard work was starting to pay off in 2013, Yolanda came and destroyed most of what they have put up. The farm was declared totally damaged.

Despite the dire circumstances, Kap Alex and some members of VILCOA braved the distance of around 74 km from Jaro to Ormoc City, Leyte on foot after the typhoon. They bought seeds from the money they had. They

did not waste any time in rehabilitating the farm. They also received farm inputs from private and government organizations. It was no wonder that in January of 2014, more than a month after Yolanda, VILCOA was the first among the many farms in Leyte to supply vegetables.

The Yolanda experience taught Kap Alex to be proactive. Hence, he had his own farm insured and encouraged the association to do so as well. He also taught his members not to rely solely on dole outs and to work hard for the money.

### Agri-tourism in sight

One can expect more achievements for Kap Alex and VILCOA. This hardworking farmer-leader continues to be very active in sharing his expertise with others. More so now that he has tied up with the Agricultural Training Institute-Regional Training Institute VIII (ATI-RTC VIII) which has started to tap him and the farm for some of the Center's activities and advocacies. Kap Alex also attends trainings to further hone his farming skills and add more to the technology pool of VILCOA. The farm has also started to accept students from Visayas State University, Alangalang campus for their on-the-job training.

Kap Alex proudly shares the plans for the farm, "Years from now, visitors will come and see a different VILCOA farm. We hope to engage in agri-tourism. So far, farmers and interested individuals have started to come and look at the farm hoping to learn from the

technologies we have here. To accommodate them, we have built a training hall. We also plan to build a facility for those who want to spend the night in the farm." For agri-tourism, the farm is intensively reinventing its landscape.

Kap Alex literally put Jaro's last frontier, Brgy. Villaconzoilo, on the map as more and more people are taking notice of their successes. This attention is also instrumental to the concreting of farm-to-market roads, making the barangay more accessible to development projects from the local government.

Kap Alex has proven that when people help each other, they can achieve greater things. His dedication to change the lives of the people in his community is remarkable. It seems that he would never tire of learning and sharing his knowledge. Though he has delegated certain responsibilities to other VILCOA members, his constant presence in the farm has assured them that he will never leave them behind. Wherever he goes, he brings with him not his own successes but that of the association.

When asked what contributed to the successes of VILCOA, he simply attributed it to the cooperation, trust, and commitment of each member of the community. But others would surely agree that Kap Alex is an important element in the community's road to success. Kap Alex and VILCOA, theirs is an example of what true leadership should be.



1

Where it all started

If Baguio has “La Presa”, Bukidnon has Alomah. The hit TV show “Forevermore” may have been gone in the airwaves for sometime but Agnes and Xander’s love story lives on. However, it is no match to Grace and Benjohn’s—and their story deserves a wider audience.

Alomah is a two-hectare farm in Dahilayan, Manolo Fortich, Bukidnon. It takes around an hour to get there from Cagayan de Oro City, quite a long travel. Once you get there, however, it is worth it. It is a gem of a farm. It guarantees that it will not disappoint since it reminds of a classic commercial with countryside ambiance replete with rolling verdant hills, pristine cool waters and robust regal horses.

Visitors often ask what Alomah means. The name, according to Benjohn, could be an acronym for A Love of Mountain and Horses or the much clever A Look of Man’s Agricultural Haven. But Alomah is actually a combination of the couple’s surnames. (Grace) Alombro and (Benjohn) Mahistrado. Both had farmer-parents who were their major influences in farming.

In their early beginnings, they literally have nothing, just dreams. They worked for a contract grower of pigs for Monterey for 15 years. It was during those times that they absorbed knowledge and information like sponge. They put their mind into whatever they see as a learning opportunity.

According to Grace, the evolution of Alomah came out from the demands and opportunities presented by patrons in their walk-in basis. Alomah started out as a passion in 2010 and the idea of earning big was far from the couples’ mind. “In 2012, six batches of Girls Scout of the Philippines came here. They were around 100. The coordinator found our place ideal for camping and demonstration of survival lesson”, she recalled. In 2014, Alomah commercially opened to the public after developing it gradually and upon the influence of the Agricultural Training Institute (ATI). They are slowly becoming a farm-tourism destination.



# ALOMAH'S ALLURE: SHIFTING PASSION TO ATTRACTION

Vic Thor A. Palarca

2

An uphill climb

Benjohn and Grace married young—just fresh out of college. Benjohn finished Automotive Mechanic while Grace finished Commerce. Their union is blessed with three children; Grace Marie Amor, John David and John Diego.

They vowed to solidify their marriage and prove that they made the right decision. This motivated them to work harder and smarter. They constantly find ways to earn extra income. Benjohn engaged in direct selling and purveys whatever merchandise he sees fit for retail. He even sold top brands such as Tupperware, Jockey and W. Brown.

One of the challenges they met along the way before their farms’ inception was adjusting to various personalities of people they brush elbows with. Also, it was their meager income in the yesteryears that prompted them to give value and worth to their hard-earned money.

“We don’t normally go to the city and malls or shops,” Grace said. As evident in their lifestyle and purchasing habits, the couple’s common attitude when it comes to money matters is to avoid unnecessary spending. What they have learned also is to engage in simple living and spending within their means. Another common character trait of them is that they are generous and are easy in giving their blessings to their neighbors and community.

3

Steady gains

Benjohn, in his younger years was already business savvy, even before Alomah was established. What made them decide to go full time in farming was because of the opportunities they saw during exposure trips and the trainings they attended, an opportunity they enjoyed when their farm was accredited as an ATI Learning Site.

Some of the farming innovations that they are into include soil conservation (riprap), edible landscaping and container gardening such as potted herbs and potted lettuces. Their regular patrons are families and friends wanting to have respite from the busy everyday life in the city.

In Alomah, the main crop is lettuce with four varieties that are regularly planted all year. Iceberg, Romaine, Green Leaf, and Red Leaf varieties are the main staple in major trade fairs and agri-events they attend within Region X.

Alomah’s edge over other farms is their readily available vegetable salad with a dressing that Grace has formulated and herb tea which promotes good health and well being. The power couple were the first and only farmer-owner who produces organically-grown lettuce in their community. Perhaps, their resiliency and their ability to adapt to change took a drastic turn by 2013 when the demand for lettuce was high that they decided to keep up and meet the challenge head on.

Promotion and marketing-wise, the couple rely by means of word-of-mouth. For now, they can cater to one to three groups consisting of 10 to 15 persons at the same time, having built two training halls. They have also built additional cottages for overnight accommodation. It is during weekends and holidays especially during holy week that they are fully booked since most families and friends get together happen around that time.

4

Going the distance

Now that things are going well their way, the couple were right all along in their motto “Shifting passion to attraction”. Benjohn and Grace have turned their zeal for farming and good food into an enterprise.

With their growing popularity and influence, they took heart their social responsibility as communal farmers by reaching out and by generating employment. They even encouraged other farmers to engage in backyard gardening. They put effort in educating the consumers and wholesale buyers about their produce and the organic way of farming.

On some occasions, they even offer a farm tour free of charge to farmer colleagues. At present, Benjohn is the president of the civic work group KALINDA or Kalugmanan, Lindaban, Dahilayan Irrigator’s Association. This keeps him busy and in touch with neighboring communities aside from his daily farming engagements.

Alomah’s future plans include a spa and wellness center, a restaurant using its own fresh produce, and a regular horse show. The horse show is a no brainer since the power couple shares a love for horses. Trophies by the couple and their children on various horse competition events adorn the training hall.

The legacy they want to leave behind and be remembered by, is that they be known for serving the freshest vegetable salad and herb tea in Bukidnon—forevermore.



# Changing through the Storms

Michael D. Villezar

Tropical storms are perhaps one of the most common yet destructive natural calamities that left imprints in the lives of majority of the Bicolanos in Catanduanes. Not just because of its multiple annual occurrences but because of the severity of damages it brings to property, natural resources, and precious human lives. For them, typhoons are looming dangers that can strike anytime, anywhere and with an unpredictable extent of damages.

The fear and anxiety are most felt by farmers in Catanduanes whose livelihood greatly depends on the uncontrollable forces of nature. Leaving them no other choice but to courageously deal with the catastrophes, damages, uncertainties and dire economic losses left behind by tropical storms or typhoons. Confronted by these natural calamities all throughout the year, farmers have accepted that typhoons in their area should be smartly dealt with rather than ignored or feared of.

Looking beyond the negativities that come along with it, the farmers have started to look into the brighter side of the situation, facing the challenge to improve and become innovative and creative in their farming strategies and technologies. These are the same scenarios and the very same reasons that motivated Luzviminda Oropesa, known by her friends as 'Mam Minda'.

## Storm Signal # 1... The beginning

Mam Minda is a native of Baras, a fifth class municipality in the province of Catanduanes. A retired Geologist by profession, Mam Minda is a farmer at heart and by affiliation.

She used to be a Corporate Social Responsibility Officer of a well-known mining company in Mac-Arthur, Leyte, handling the rehabilitation and restoration of mined areas as well as capacitating the local residents and providing them with livelihood opportunities. In the course of performing this job, Mam Minda realized that the greatest and foremost challenge for her is how to restore the nutrient and natural flora and fauna of the mined soil, replenishing the soil's structure and texture as well as the beneficial microorganisms that thrive in it.

This challenge prompted her to seek the assistance of government agencies that can provide her with the information and technology she needed. Her search led her to work with Agricultural Training Institute (ATI) Regional Training Center VIII. This paved the way for a subsequent productive partnership with the agency and her 'love affair' with organic agriculture and natural farming systems, a partnership that continues up to the present.

## Storm Signal # 2... The return to the land of her birth

After five successful years of working at the eco-farm in mining areas in Mac Arthur, Leyte, Mam Minda retired from her job and decided to go back to Catanduanes to manage and develop their family's acquired land and properties. Armed with her knowledge and experiences on natural farming system, she started applying the technologies she learned from her experiences in Leyte to their own farm.

In 2012, she started growing and propagating African Nightcrawlers through vermi-composting which she subsequently used in producing her compost and organic fertilizers.

Because of her love for farming and her desire to share her knowledge and technology with other farmers in their area, she developed their farm, advocated the use and benefits of organic agriculture and started capacitating her farm workers and other farmers in the community. In doing so, she made sure that she was able to communicate, integrate and highlight the benefits of organic farming in terms of its economic, health and wellness and environmental aspects.

## Storm Signal # 3... The challenge

In the beginning, the road to change was not easy for Mam Minda. Introducing and promoting a farming method, system and technology for production of crops and livestock proved to be more difficult especially since farmers are used to more conventional ways. It took a while and lots of effort to convince and encourage farmers to embrace the benefits and positive effects of organic agriculture. Instead of giving up, she persisted and intensified her campaign, partnering more with government agencies in her quest to increase the adoption of organic and natural farming in their area.

Expectedly, Mam Minda's persistence and tenacity paid off. Her partnership with government agencies yielded considerable benefits not only for her but her entire community of farmers as well.

She and her group were awarded a P2.5 million worth of project through the Bureau of Soils and Water Management (BSWM) under its Enhanced Modified Rapid Composting (EMRC) Program. The project

enabled them to establish a rapid modified composting facility which is now their main source of organic fertilizer for their rice production.

While implementing their EMRC project, the ATI Regional Training Center Region V conducted a Season-long Training on Organic Agriculture for farmers in their community. These efforts and productive partnership helped them to achieve considerable increase in organic rice yield from 2.7 to 6.0 tons per hectare—an almost tripled value compared to their previous rice production ventures using conventional farming methods.

## Storm Signal # 4... Sustaining the change

Through perseverance, continuous development of their farms, advocacy

campaigns, training and education of farmers and ultimately translating the efficiency and effectiveness of organic agriculture production technology into increased yield and monetary gains, Mam Minda eventually found it easier to encourage and convince more farmers to adopt the same. Because of the established organizational and relational dynamics among farmers in their group, Mam Minda led them to expand their activities to the production of other high value commercial crops that can increase their livelihood and income. This also paved way to the organization and registration of Happy Farmers Producers Integrated and Livelihood Association Incorporated (HAFPIA Inc.) wherein members are graduates of season-long Farmers Field Schools (FFS). Presently, her own and her group's farms serve as ATI Learning Sites of the ATI-RTC V.

Mam Minda's enthusiasm and steadfastness

brought her recognition. She received various awards from the different agencies in the region and in the national level such as the Department of Environment and Natural Resources' 2014 Saringaya Awards for her exemplary and selfless dedication to the environmental protection, conservation management and rehabilitation through her Diversified Integrated Farming System and Waste Recycling. Likewise, the 2014 Regional Outstanding Rural Women, as one of the six National Awardees of 2015 Search for Outstanding Rural Women.

Indeed, a difficult beginning brought productive and promising endeavour. Mam Minda's hardwork produced countless ripples of advantages not only for her but for her community. What started off as showers of change, became a super typhoon of benefits and opportunities of achieving better lives in the rural areas of Baras, Catanduanes.



# A Woman's Advocacy on Organic Farming

Belly Joy T. Arpay

Evangeline Guden Luceño, an advocate of organic farming, continues her passion by producing and selling her certified organic products to benefit the people and the community.

"Vangie", as her friends call her, is an active member of the Rural Improvement Club (RIC) in Pagadian City. She was blessed with a loving and supportive husband and four children. She is an advocate of organic farming.

## The Start

Her plan to build a business started when she attended the National Training on Herbal Plants Production and Processing of Alternative Medicines on April 7 to 9, 2014 at Remnant Institute of Alternative Medicine (RIAM), La Paz, Iloilo City, which was conducted by the Agricultural Training Institute. After the training, she was given a peppermint planting material and propagated it. After sometime, she was able to establish her own peppermint garden, and started to process her plants as peppermint tea and balm.

## The Trial

Later, she encouraged other farmers and even her relatives to plant peppermint for them to have an extra income. However, the

farmers were discouraged when El Niño hit their place, and all their plants were damaged. She almost lost hope but still continued her passion and regained her farmers' trust.

This woman tried her best to continue what she started. She found ways to have a continuous supply of her own products.

She propagated her peppermint plants in different places where there are plenty of water, so that she would still be able to supply the orders of her customers.

## The Courage

During El Niño and La Niña seasons, she thought of making another product aside from the peppermint. She is also processing sambong and kalachuchi, since these plants are abundant and not seasonal. These are being made into balm and ointments.

## The Change

For this passion, she was recognized by different government agencies and even served as a resource speaker of different events, like the Mindanao Climate Change Summit 2015 in Bukidnon; National RIC Convention in Zamboanga City last 2015;

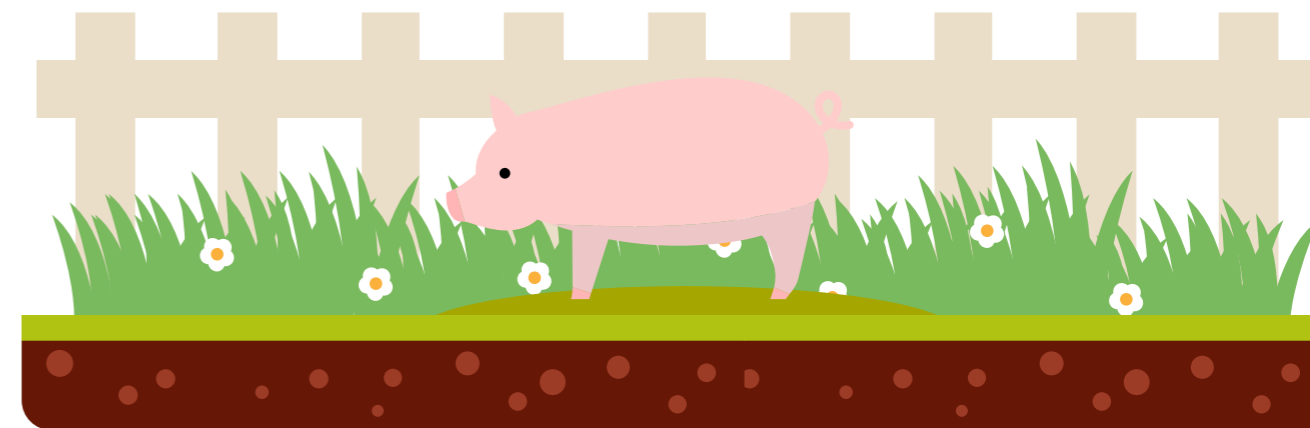
and other activities where she can share her knowledge on herbs production and processing. Her products are already distributed not only in Pagadian City but also to the different parts of the Philippines. She has always participated in various trainings which enhanced her capability to develop and create more products particularly on herbs.

## The Strength

A business will always start from having nothing, if you have the courage and determination, then do something. Nothing will happen if you don't risk it. As she said, "we should do our best among ourselves... bit by bit but not until it's lost, to be able to sustain the business".

**"If you are successful, it is because somewhere, sometime, someone gave you a life or an idea that started you in the right direction. Remember also that you are indebted to life until you help some less fortunate person, just as you were helped."**

- Melinda Gates (Philanthropist)



# Be One of a Kind

Reynadez M. Lim

Known as 'Nong Frank' in his locality, this 48-year-old man is indeed a one-of-a-kind farmer. He went from being a typical and conventional one to a Gawad Saka awardee and Magsasaka Siyentista.

Francisco Manigo, a native of Matabao in Tubigon, Bohol, has really something to say in terms of farming especially as he has received several training programs from the Agricultural Training Institute Regional Training Center (RTC) in Region VII. With his experiences and educational background on agriculture, Nong Frank became an organic farmer and entrepreneur. He served several times as a resource person on various training activities conducted by both government and non-government organizations pertaining to organic agriculture.

In the past, Nong Frank supported inorganic practices since he worked at a commercial fertilizer manufacturing company, convincing farmers to patronize their products. He saw that adapting to the organic way was good but it takes time to achieve the desired results. Disregarding the long term advantages of organic farming, he continued to use chemical-based farming practices.

## Starting from what he learned

"Tungod sa training sa ATI, nabuka ang akong mga mata," he admitted when he was asked how he became an organic farmer. [The ATI's training activities opened my eyes on the situation of today's farming.]

Nong Frank started using the natural farming system (NFS) in his vegetable garden and rice field. Instead of gradual application of organic inputs and NFS, he even decided to do it rapidly. As a result, he yielded less but it didn't stop him from pursuing his new advocacy.

## Surviving no matter what

After some time, he rehabilitated his piggery. He practiced NFS in sanitation and nutrient and feeding management. He was fine with it until he realized that he was losing time to manage his other farm commodities aside from the pigs. He said that it was due to the high labor requirement in preparing the ingredients like chopping green leaves, plants and/or fruits for fermentation. So he decided to cut the labor and looked for plants rich in nutrients but don't need much manpower.

He remembered his thesis while in Southwestern University where he studied the utilization of Azolla, a floating fern (small green plant in form) that could be used as feeds to livestock. Applying his own research to his farm was an innovative idea and requires less work.

"Di na man kinahanglan i-chop kay gagmay man unya mas dali sad ang fermentation, 12 to 24 hours lang, ready na siya," he further explained. [There's no need to chop azolla and fermentation is faster. It only takes 12 to 24 hours.]

Unexpectedly, he had an accident in 2012 and, the next year, an earthquake knocked

down his pig pens which forced him to sell everything. These left him with nothing.

Fortunately, he was awarded last year with a financial assistance from the ATI under a program for rural-based organizations worth P25,000. With all his knowledge and determination to rise again, he maximized the assistance in re-establishing his piggery.

"Ang ako sad mga honorarium as resource person, ako sad gigamit sa babyan," he added. [I also used the honorarium I received as a resource person in trainings to put up my piggery].

## Reaping what he sowed

Presently, he operates his piggery with his so-called SNAPPY principles and technology. SNAPPY stands for Sustainable, Natural And Profitable PiggerY. He also established linkages with the market.

Nong Frank said that he also asked the local government unit in Tubigon for assistance to make his farm into a learning site as what he has dreamt of. He wants to share what he knows and influence more people to go organic.

Asked what his advice for fellow farmers is, he stressed that it's the values. It is not easy to go organic but if you have the values of determination and put this into action, it is not impossible.

# MAKE IT RICE

Jamila Monette B. Balmeo

Rice is considered as a staple food in Southeast Asian countries including the Philippines. This makes farmers a vital part of society. They farm to provide food for the people. This includes Rosemarie Centina, also known as "Tita Mayeth", a 61-year-old farmer who hails from Luisiana, Laguna.

## EARLY BEGINNINGS

Tita Mayeth is the eldest in a brood of 10 and, as a child, her parents taught her how to farm. She and two of her siblings ventured into rice farming as it was through this that her youngest siblings were able to finish college.

"Sa pagsasaka kinuha ang pampa-aral sa kanila. Yung dalawa kong kapatid parehong chemical engineer na. Tapos yung isa ay teacher," Tita Mayeth shared.

## TAKING THE RESPONSIBILITY

When her mother stopped farming due to old age, Tita Mayeth, being the eldest child, took the responsibility of taking care and managing their rice field.

For almost 20 years, Tita Mayeth has been into the farming business. Before, they were only tenants until they bought it in 2000. Today, her family owns three and a half hectares of rice field.

## BUILDING FARMING CAPACITY

Countless trainings have been on the list of priorities for Tita Mayeth. She was awarded as the "Outstanding Rice Farmer" from 2005 to 2007.

"Kapag my sinabing seminar ako nama'y pirming ready. Dahil ang katwiran ko nga, hindi ka matututo kung hindi ka a-attend ng mga seminar. Di para sa sarili laang, para makatulong din sa iba," she said. She added that attending trainings lessened expenses and resulted in an increase in rice yield.

She described that "Noong ako ay di pa naga-attend ng training, napakadami nang nagagamit na binhi. Nitong ako ay naka-attend ng mga seminar, ang 40 kilos na binhi ay nagkakasya na sa isang ektarya, yun ay certified. Pero 'pag sa hybrid, nagkakasya na ang 10 kilos. Yung 20 kilos ay talagang sobra-sobra na. Kaya napakalaking natitipid. Sa ani naman ay talagang nakaranas kami halos na naging triple ang palay. Nakaranas kami dito ng isang ektarya, nung ako ay mag Gawad Saka, ng hanggang 180. Nung kami ay nag-hybrid noon, umabot ng 10 tons isang ektarya."

To date, Tita Mayeth still attends trainings and workshops to continue learning and apply techniques in rice production.

## ACHIEVING GOALS

When her husband died, farming became the main source of income for the family. "Nung mga anak ko ay nag-aaral sa highschool, ang gastos talaga ay kinukuha sa pagsasaka ang pambaon. Hanggang sila ay mag-college, sa pagsasaka ko pa rin kinukuha," she highlighted.

The eldest child, Rosalyn, graduated with a degree in Bachelor of Science in Commerce from Pamantasan ng Lungsod ng Maynila. While her two youngest sons, Rodolfo Jr. and Ricardo, both graduated from Electromechanic Technology in Dualtech Center, Canlubang, Laguna. They are now both working in a renowned aircraft company. Rodolfo Jr. is happily married with a daughter and currently working in Etihad Airways based in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates as a structural mechanic. The youngest child, Ricardo, has been working in Lufthansa Technik in Pasay City, Philippines for nine years as a Senior Toolkeeper.

Aside from rice farming, Tita Mayeth also plants organic vegetables as another source of income. She also has fish (tilapia) pond. As a member of the Rural Improvement Club, she also makes dishwashing liquid and is into food processing as well.

## FACING CHALLENGES

In spite of all her triumphs, Tita Mayeth also experienced struggles in life. One of these was the calamity brought by typhoons. "Nakaranas nga kami noon na pag-bagyo, 'pag tumingin ako sa aking gulayan at yung palay, talagang lahat ay nakabuwal. Ang tingin sa tubigan ay parang dagat," she recalled.

However, never did Tita Mayeth think of giving up and lose everything she has started. Instead, this misfortune only made her better and continue doing great things. "Sabi nga ni nanay ay para man ding 'di ikaw namomroblema. Kitang kita mo na sirang sira. Eh 'di pag nasira ayusin. Taniman uli, magtanim uli," she quipped.

## LOOKING FORWARD

Tita Mayeth advices other farmers to continue learning and adopt new technologies for the progress of their rice farms. "Huwag silang titigil ng pag-aaral. Kahit sabihin na tayo ay nasa pagsasaka ay kailangan dire-diretso ang ating pag-aaral para makaranas tayo ng magandang ani. Kung ano ang tinuturo ay sundin naman," she expressed.

Indeed, Tita Mayeth sets a good example and serves as a true inspiration not only to her fellow farmers but also to all Filipinos.

Distracted with new technologies around, children are veering away from agriculture. Some cannot see the significance of agriculture—being dirty and all. Some cannot even identify crops or plants without seeing their fruits. Luckily, in a town located in Tarlac, agriculture is still being taught to the youth.

### Experience with children

1

A native from Ramos, Tarlac, Melecio Reguindin, Jr., a computer teacher-turned-full-time farmer, approached the agriculture teachers in Guiteb Elementary School and shared to them ways on how to improve activities for the children.

As told by Lilia Armina, Agriculture Leader from the said school, Reguindin was a big help to them, much more to the kids. Armina admitted that they, even as teachers, have limited knowledge about agriculture, thus they needed someone like Reguindin, a farmer who is willing to help.

Reguindin made sure that he shared his learnings to children. He went to the school to teach them about organic farming. It starts with a lecture. Then hands-on activities followed. He supervised the children on how to plant the crops and what strategies to use.

Reguindin made use of the available resources in the school's backyard such as dried leaves and even chicken dung since they have a small poultry area. With his help, the plants and the area in the backyard of the school improved.

2

### Feat with Palayamanan

With his experiences in various trainings and activities, Reguindin became confident in the craft of agriculture. Through the Agricultural Training Institute (ATI), he made his action plan tangible (since he was a Farmers' Field School [FFS] participant) through planting vegetables in his community. He even encouraged the out-of-school youth to join him in the activity. With all the trainings he attended and activities he has done, he became more knowledgeable towards farming.

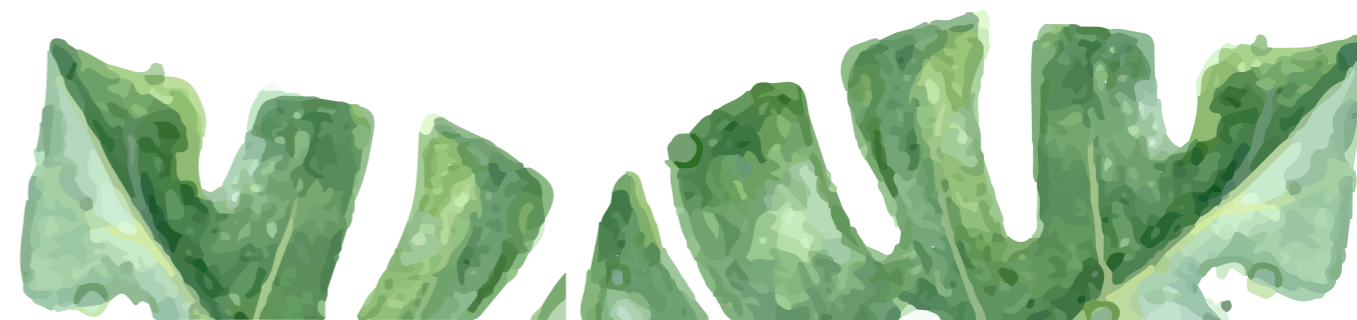
In 2014, Reguindin started to adopt a new system of farming: Palayamanan. This was a very fitting remedy because he has been implementing mono-cropping his whole farming life. After harvesting for one cropping season, he has no income after that. However, with his determination, he did not let this hindrance affect in achieving success. "Ako po ay hindi humihinto hanggang hindi po ako nagtatagumpay! I don't give up until I succeed," he added.

As the chosen recipient of the Palayamanan project, just using the small area that his mother gave him, he invested in various commodities: livestock, vegetables, rice, and fish pond. With Palayamanan, he claims that his income doubled.

### Dream for the future

When asked what his dream is, the Palayamanan farmer answered that he wants to help and teach the children, who will eventually become farmers in the future, and co-farmers to adopt the system that he is using for them to make their lives easier and become successful. The Municipal Agriculturist (MA) of Ramos, Tarlac, Arceli Agustin, attested to that. She said, "Very eager si Mel na i-share ang kanyang mga natutunan sa kanyang kapwa magsasaka at sa mga bata [Mel is very eager to share what he has learned to other farmers and the youth]."

With his love for agriculture, he doesn't want the children to be ignorant about it. Without agriculture, there is no food. As they say, the children is the hope of the nation. By not teaching them, surely the next generation will become ignorant and will starve to death. And he will never let that happen.



# PUSHING THE YOUTH FORWARD THROUGH AGRICULTURE

Eula Dee A. Lañada



# The Weight of Silence: A Noise of Triumph

Julius Kevin B. Cusap

*"Let your work prove your worth," Engr. Ramon Oliveros, Jr. confidently said as we toured his well-managed rice-based integrated farm. He is a graduate of electrical engineering, but his achievement shows more of him as an agricultural scientist. He is a rice farmer-breeder and was able to breed a high-yielding inbred variety using back-crossing method. He has never been known for this achievement. But this was his stepping stone to success.*

## His humble beginning

Mon, as he is fondly called by friends and colleagues, is originally from Buguey, Cagayan. His family moved to San Guillermo, Isabela in 1963 for greener pastures. Later on, due to his and his family's hardships brought by unstable peace and order, they finally moved to Barangay Simimbaan, Roxas, Isabela in 1973.

In Simimbaan, his parents started as tenants. "The meager income earned by my parents from tenancy was barely enough to support our basic needs and to finance our education," he explained. But, he said, he persisted and worked hard to help his parents so that they could send him to school. Luckily, he was able to graduate his course at FEATI University, Manila in 1985.

Wanting to explore better opportunities, he went to Saudi Arabia and worked there for 10 years as an electrical engineer. Together with his wife, who happened to work in the same country as a nurse, they built a dream of a successful and financially stable family.

His passion for farming moved him to go back with his wife in the Philippines after 10 years. Using their savings, they bought a three-hectare rice farm in San Roque, Roxas, Isabela.

## His initiatives towards the realization of his dream

"I love farming but I didn't know where to start and what to start," he said. He asked for assistance from farmers in the neighborhood. Farming was just a self-subsistence living when he started. His yield during the Masagana '99 program was only 50 cavans per hectare which is below the average of 80 cavans per hectare. Never in his wildest dreams that he would become a farmer-breeder.

"One day, a friend invited me to join a training on rice seed growing at Agricultural Training Institute-Regional Training Center (ATI-RTC) II in San Mateo," he explained. This was

indeed a life-changing experience for him. He tried in his farm the technology learned. He eventually became a rice seed grower. Aside from trainings attended, he explored every possible way of gaining knowledge. He sought assistance from the office of the Municipal Agriculturist. Later, he joined the Isabela Seed Growers Association for wider network and linkages technically and socially.

## His innovation pays

As rice seed grower, Mang Jun learned the techniques of producing both inbred and hybrid rice seeds through constant attendance to trainings and through experiences. "Rice seed production is a very profitable enterprise," he exclaimed. In a hectare, he can earn an average income of P200,000 in both seasons. With his income, he was able to acquire more rice farms and expand his rice seed production from three hectares to 18 hectares.

His innovativeness did not escape the attention of the authorities of the Cagayan Valley Agricultural Resources Research and Development (CVARRD) Consortium and appointed him as Magsasaka Siyentista in 2005. As Magsasaka Siyentista, he continuously practiced rice-breeding. He was able to produce a prominent high-yielding variety of rice through back-crossing of Mestizo 1 Hybrid variety. He is now waiting for the possibility of registering and patenting the variety under his name. Though the variety is not yet registered with the National Seed Industry Council, it is the most sought variety in the locality due to its high yield. "Quality produce has always been my objective, so I adhere to seed quality standards set by Bureau of Plant Industry - National Seed Quality Control Services and had a regular accreditation as seed grower both for hybrid and inbred rice," he assured.

Aside from rice seed production, Mang Jun is also practicing integrated farming. He has two hectares devoted to mango and other fruit tree orchard. He likewise established piggery, poultry, and vegetables enterprises and now earning an additional income for his family.

His farm is now on the process of certification for Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) by the Department of Agriculture (DA). "I was interested to apply what I learned during my GAP training at ATI-RTC II. I knew that this will help me in managing my farm to produce high quality and safe products," he proudly said. He is currently complying with the GAP practices and has undergone the voluntary audits conducted by the national GAP evaluation team in preparation for GAP certification.

Mang Jun has always been the cooperator of technology demonstration projects of the Municipal Agricultural Office in Roxas, Isabela. His farm has also been the venue for educational tours of farmers and students in the locality. Recognizing the contribution of his farm in extension, ATI-RTC II selected Mang Jun's farm as a Learning Site for agricultural technologies and awarded him a development fund worth P50,000 for the establishment of a training hall.



## The Heart of a Missionary

Mang Jun loves to share his experiences and innovations with other farmers. He conducted techno-demo and field days with farmers in his barangay on hybrid rice technology. He likewise shared his technology with other farmers who come to him for advice.

He shares his concern for his struggling fellow farmers due to insufficient capital and have become slaves of loans from private traders with very high interest rates.

"Most farmers are compelled to sell their freshly threshed produce which commanded very low price due to lack of drying pavement, adding to the burden of insufficient fund to pay their debts," he said. This scenario moved him to organize the Simimbaan-Casilbangan Irrigators Association (SIMCA IA).

SIMCA is composed of three barangays namely, Simimbaan, Sotero Nueva, and Batog in Roxas, Isabela. It covers 377 hectares of irrigated rice. "I encouraged my group to actively participate in Farmers' Field School, technical briefings, farmers' meetings, technology and method demonstrations conducted by the local government unit," he said.

Because of his active involvement in extension service, he was designated as Farmer-Leader Extensionist (FLE) of the Office of the Municipal Agriculturist in Roxas, Isabela. As FLE, he spearheaded the hybridization program in Roxas particularly in the areas of SIMCA IA. Later, SIMCA IA was selected as one of the model rice clusters in Region II. Through his leadership as rice cluster president, SIMCA IA Rice Cluster became the most successful rice model clusters in the area.

It was a morale booster and an achievement for Mang Jun as he proudly said, "There is no problem that cannot be solved if we are united."

## The Fruits of His Efforts

As we walked around his warehouse, Mang Jun pointed to me all his farm equipment. He said that with his income from his farm, he was able to acquire one unit of six-wheeler hauling truck which serves as a delivery truck, two units of rice thresher, two heads of carabao

for land preparation, and hauling purposes. He was also able to expand his rice farm from three hectares to 18 hectares for rice seed production. This inspired him to establish a rice processing plant where he processes his own seeds from cleaning, sorting, grading, and packaging for commercial selling.

"Today, I have my family business Bambang Seed Center and Agri-Farm Supply in Nueva Vizcaya, and is operating continuously with expansion in Isabela and Cagayan. My quality rice seeds are most sought by my clients," he proudly said.

Aside from financial and social rewards, the achievements of Mang Jun brought him to fame and recognition. He was awarded for his Outstanding Performance and Commitment last December 8, 2015 at DA Regional Field Office II for having yielded 10 metric tons of rice per hectare. Likewise, he was a recipient of the National Rice Achiever Award last April 20, 2016 for his significant contribution to the rice sufficiency program for three consecutive years.

Moreover, his dream for his family was finally fulfilled. His first child graduated Bachelor of Science (BS) in Psychology at the University of Sto. Tomas and is currently taking Doctor of Medicine. Meanwhile, his second graduated BS Economics at the University of the Philippines-Diliman and his third child is currently taking up BS Architecture at the National University. Also, Mang Jun and his wife were able to build their dream house in Brgy. Bantog, Roxas, Isabela.

With pride, he said, "ATI-RTC II is one among institutions that contributed much to my success as a farmer-entrepreneur. The knowledge and skills I acquired in trainings harnessed and empowered me to become what I am now."

Few words come out from his mouth, but Mang Jun proved once again that "action speaks louder than words."

# Looking Into the Heart of a Certified Woman Rice Seed Grower

Ma. Pamela N. Respecia

Turning 67 years old, Anita Jover Mandalupe was born and raised by parents who depended on agriculture as livelihood. She is a native of a rice farming area in Cansa-naan, Mabinay, Negros Oriental. Fueled by determination of uplifting her family's quality of life, she mastered the technique on rice production. She participated in various non-government and government agricultural activities. She's one of the few females who became certified seed growers in the province. She is helping achieve the envisioned rice sufficiency by producing more good quality and high-yielding rice seed varieties. Her noble contribution to the community made her an Outstanding Farmer from 1998 to 1999 during the Search for Regional Gawad Saka in Region VII. Since then, she never stopped learning.



## Coping up with challenges in life

When her husband suffered from a mild stroke in 2006, Anita took over all the responsibilities at home, earning a living for her seven children and send them to college.

She noticed then that rice production alone definitely could not cover all the household expenses and her husband's health maintenance. Responsive to technological change, she ventured into diversified farming with rice as the main crop. Other crops grown are mango, banana, coconut, fruit trees, and assorted vegetables.

Aside from growing crops, Anita also raised livestock including swine and cattle. The sales from the fattened swine and cattle were used to purchase one unit of thresher, which she rents to the neighbouring farmers.

Another project she managed to put up is duck-raising. With 80 duck heads, she harvested an average of 64 eggs daily which she sells at P4.00 per piece. Sales from eggs enabled her to improve their house. Likewise, she purchased a cattle and paid her daughter's one school semester tuition fee in Nursing.

## Finding out her purpose

Though focused on improving her family's quality of life, she was able to extend her services to fellow farmers.

One of her noble contributions to the development of the community was the donation of a piece of land for the construction of a multi-purpose drying pavement. The pavement serves the farmer-members of the Cansa-naan Farmers Association, a group of rice farmers she organized and whom she is sharing her good practices on diversified farming with. Anita also loaned 30 sacks of seeds to her fellow farmers without interest during the El Niño phenomenon. This helped them recover from their loss during the calamity.

## Reaping the seeds she sown

For more than 20 years in farming, Anita fought against all odds to improve productivity not only for her own family but also for the other farmers in the community.

Her seven children were all able to go to college. Six of them became professionals in the fields of Nursing, Education, and Marine Engineering. She has established the integrity of a trusted rice seed grower in the province. In fact, many buyers from the neighbouring towns would prefer to buy rice from her farm because they knew that it is certified good variety of rice seeds.

Anita is now happily living with her growing family and enjoying life at its best. At the same time, she remains a living testimony that, indeed, hard work without love and passion is nothing.



1

Neil Anthony Aban is a young native of Mobo, Masbate who is most known for his nice, easygoing personality. He paints, is an active member of their church, and does volunteer work. Most importantly, he is a farmer and downright proud of it.

2

According to Neil, he does his best to help other farmers develop their skills and knowledge and realize how important their role is in building and sustaining a nation. "What I want to see is for Filipinos to have a better impression of farming and for Filipino farmers to have a better impression of themselves. Farmers need to feel more proud about themselves and their profession because it is them who feed the people," he says.

To fulfill this mission, Neil gladly serves as a resource person in trainings for local farmers where he shares about vermiculture and the formulation of organic fertilizer and feeds for chicken and pigs. He also volunteers as a livelihood coordinator in a local Gawad Kalinga village where he teaches families about backyard vegetable farming.

# Young, Farming, and LOVING IT

Erika Z. Vizcarra

3

## Neil goes to the school of life

Neil is likewise the municipal president of the association of 4H Clubs in their area. In addition, he mentors the trainees of the Young Filipino Farmers' Training Program in Japan (YFFTPJ), a program implemented by the Agricultural Training Institute (ATI) in partnership with Japan's Ministry on Agriculture, Fisheries, and Forestry and the Japan Agricultural Exchange Council.

All these he does while continually developing his half-a-hectare vegetable farm. "I am really enjoying my work. This is part of my commitment as a YFFTPJ alumus myself. I don't do it for the money. This is simply what I wanted to do since I returned from my training in Japan," the 25-year-old shares.

Learning is very important to Neil whose early dream was to finish school. In 2007, he took up a Nursing degree hoping to be able to help his parents later on. However, he had to stop shortly after because of financial difficulties. He then used his free time to put up a small art business.

The income wasn't too steady, however. It was then that he decided to join the Mobo-ans 4H Club which enabled him to start a small hog-raising and vegetable farming enterprise. "4H encouraged me to venture into farming and the YFFTPJ moved me to pursue farming full time."

4

What Neil knows about farming now, he credits to the Japanese farmer who took him in as part of his 11-month training in 2014. "In Japan, farming is considered one of the best sources of livelihood because farmers are among their richest. I wish we could say the same here," Neil muses.

One of the things he admires most about Japanese farmers is their work ethics. "Even if they already own the farms, they still stick to a strict 12-hour working schedule. There is no wasted time, each day is a productive day."

Japanese culture, despite being new for Neil, only pushed him to learn more. "When I couldn't understand some things, I would always ask my otou-san. Fortunately, he saw my inquisitiveness as an eagerness to learn," he relates. "I made mistakes sometimes but I didn't let them discourage me. I just did what I can and enjoy what I did."

5

# Neil

## the Unstoppable

Neil's farm, which he took over from his father, initially showcased a humble array of vegetables and crops including banana, cassava, and corn. In 2010, he adopted the urban containerized gardening and used animal droppings as fertilizer. He explains these methods were less costly and more convenient.

Before, his mother would sell their produce which earned them P400 per day, at most. However, it was barely enough for the daily expenses of a household of eight people. When he came back from Japan, Neil was brimming with new ideas and plans. "I wanted to manage our farm the way my otou-san manages his."

At the moment, he is saving up for the equipment he needs for his target vegetable jam-making project. He is also working on the expansion of his hog-raising enterprise and hopes to be able to start a local organic lechon business.

"I just love vegetable farming. Even when it's exhausting, there's a different kind of fulfillment on harvest day. I feel happy whenever I get to reap the fruits, or vegetables, of my labor," he jokes. With the organic farming methods he learned in Japan, Neil shares that he now knows more efficient ways of composting and pruning vegetables. "I think, nowadays, most farmers lack the technical know-how in increasing their farm's yield. Most think that fertilizer is the only way but taking good care of the crops is also key."

Neil also applies what he learned about marketing strategies. "What I do is send text messages to people in my community about my farm's vegetable offerings. I also use Facebook to encourage people to buy whatever available vegetables I have."

When orders are filled, Neil himself delivers the freshly harvested vegetables door to door for free. "I pack them in paper bags to be more eco-friendly. I also put printed recipes, such as diningding and ginataan, inside the bag. I learned this from my otou-san."

His free recipes technique seems to be a hit among his neighbors. "Sometimes, there would be nothing left for us at the house. But I am happy because I get to share my produce with my neighbors."

In 2015, Neil's mother suffered from stroke so he had to take over peddling vegetables in their community. When he is busy, Neil would ask children in their community to sell the vegetables around, paying them a generous percentage of the earnings. "Through this, children get to learn about agribusiness and become aware of vegetables as a viable source of food at the same time."



## Neil and his vision

Now, Neil earns around P1000 a day, part of which goes to their household needs while the rest is used to continuously develop his farm.

Neil's passion for vegetable farming doesn't stop within the confines of his farm. In February 2016, he gave a lecture about bio-intensive gardening to school faculty members in Balud, Masbate. This inspired school principals, teachers, and staff to further develop their "Gulayan sa Paaralan" projects. Not long after, Neil learned that one school in the area, the Palani Elementary School, won the best "Gulayan sa Paaralan" award in the entire province.

It's no wonder, then, that Neil has become very proud of his trade, which he makes sure to share with other people. "I want other farmers to see how I see farming to be enjoyable and fulfilling. I always tell other YFFTPJ trainees to just enjoy what they do, never stop learning, and carry on with their good practices."

In spite of the struggles the ordinary Filipino farmer faces, Neil is determined to make a difference one person at a time.

# SECOND CHANCES

Danica E. Melegrito

## The Search for Success

Rovelle Mendoza from Mabnang, Claveria, Cagayan, dreamed of becoming a teacher. Unfortunately, his family could not afford to send him to school.

Not wanting to give up his dream, he worked part-time in neighboring farms to fund his schooling, enabling him to finish Bachelor of Science in Elementary Education. Due to some unforeseen events, however, he was not able to take the licensure exam for teachers twice. "There are dreams that are just not meant for us and goals that are just too wild to be caught," Rovelle acknowledged.

After failing to achieve his first dream, he began to help out in the family's farm and slowly developed his love for farming. Although badly heartbroken from his first love, he is a testament to the famous quote that says, "love is sweeter the second time around."

In 2008, Rovelle started his own farm with 500 square meters of rice land borrowed from his brother, Roel. While he struggled and experienced difficulties because of the high cost of production but minimal yield, this did not stop Rovelle from achieving his dream farm.

The young farmer searched for ways to improve his knowledge through reading and the Internet as well as sought the help of their Municipal Agriculturist. He also persistently attended farmers' classes in their barangay and trainings conducted by the Agricultural Training Institute (ATI). Later on, he applied the new knowledge and skills he gained to further develop his farm.

Moreover, he began to diversify by planting different kinds of fruit trees and vegetables. He also built fish ponds and raised pigs, poultry, and goats. From all these development, Rovelle slowly began to earn back what he invested in his small and humble farm. When he found an opportunity to buy more land, he further expanded his farm. From 500, he now has a total area of 1,516 square meters of land with more diversified farm projects including additional fishponds, trees, and vegetables.

## Fulfilling the dream

Due to his outstanding achievements and contributions in the farming industry in Claveria, Cagayan, Rovelle was awarded Gawad Saka Outstanding Young Farmer in 2013.

One year later, two consecutive typhoons that hit the Philippines destroyed parts of Rovelle's farm. The calamities washed away his fishponds, blew away his vermin house, devastated his entire banana plantation, and killed his only pig and goat.

Determined, the brave farmer kept his hope. Aside from accepting help, Rovelle used part of his prize from the Gawad Saka to fully restore his farm.

Not surprisingly, Rovelle is now able to fulfil his dream of becoming a teacher as he shares his knowledge and experiences to young farmers who want to be successful like him. His own farm serves as his own learning site that inspires the youth to get into farming. He is likewise involved in the development of ATI Region II's 4H Club. In addition, Rovelle partnered with the barangay council in inspiring the youth to participate in various activities to improve their community.

At 28, Rovelle has already accomplished a lot and recognized that he would not be able to achieve all these without patience, skills, and his youthful determination. He plans to continue inspiring other people like him who once failed at some point in their lives but still want to persevere and succeed.





# 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, the batch president of the 2016 Young Filipino Farmers' Training Program in Japan (YFFTPJ), 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 and recounted everyone who made the opportunity accessible to him, thanking the Lord for the blessings He had given. Janbert's special dedication was for his parents. In tears he said, "Wala man ngayon ang parents ko, pero inaalay ko po ito sa kanila."

Throughout his speech, I could not help but hear the person beside me remark "Parang ako lang." The statement aroused my curiosity. Who was this man? 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 farm, but apart from this, his old man was entrusted to oversee almost five hectares of land. Planting, tending to animals, harvesting— that 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. Through the years, their family cultivated the land.

True enough, his charisma and servitude earned him a position in the Sangguniang Kabataan (SK) in San Antonio, Zambales whilst studying in high school. This enabled him to serve his family and the community. However, as he stepped in college, the overwhelming responsibility of juggling concerns in school, the farm, and local politics made him stop after freshmen year.

All was going well for the family even after Alexander gave up school. Until 2006, when the head of their household fell ill. "Nagkasakit ang Tatay," he recounted. "Kaya ako na ang nag-manage ng farm namin."

The need to continuously fund his father's medication made Alexander work harder than ever. In 2007, he worked as a 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.

"Dumating po ang opportunity. Nag-exam ako, at kalaunan ay napili po papuntang Japan."

## Echoes of the Past

Alexander set out to undergo 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 Aranza 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.

"Naalala ko ang lahat ng pressure at challenges sa amin [his batch]. Nandoon 'yung pressure. Kaya naman sa speech ko, napaiyak ako dahil nalampasan namin ang challenges na dinaanan namin," he shared.

## Feet on the ground

The 11 months in Japan seemed to pass by in a rush, but not without a fight. When the group went 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. Alexander did not want to cry over spilled milk. Instead of putting all his energy to worrying, Alexander treated it as a motivation to do better.

"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 host family's help. He put this into good use. "Pag-uwi ko pinaayos ko 'yung bahay namin, pinagawa ko yung farm hanggang sa na develop ito."

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, additionally 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 host farmer in Japan after he visited Alexander's farm. The money was not stacked only for his farm but Alexander shared it to help other YFFTPJ colleagues. 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, 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. To this moment, he partakes in value-adding activities to the agricultural sector. One of which is hosting YFFTPJ trainees for their home-stay module. In 2016, he hosted two young farmers for the program.

"I shared everything not only the knowledge in Nihongo but also techniques na nakuha ko sa Japan," he stated.

Apart from these, he also shares his technology to curious individuals who would happen to pass by his farm—other farmers, neighbours, 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. "No one is so poor that he cannot give."

This statement is echoed by Alexander's life—he pressed on, cultivated the knowledge that he had, and is 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.

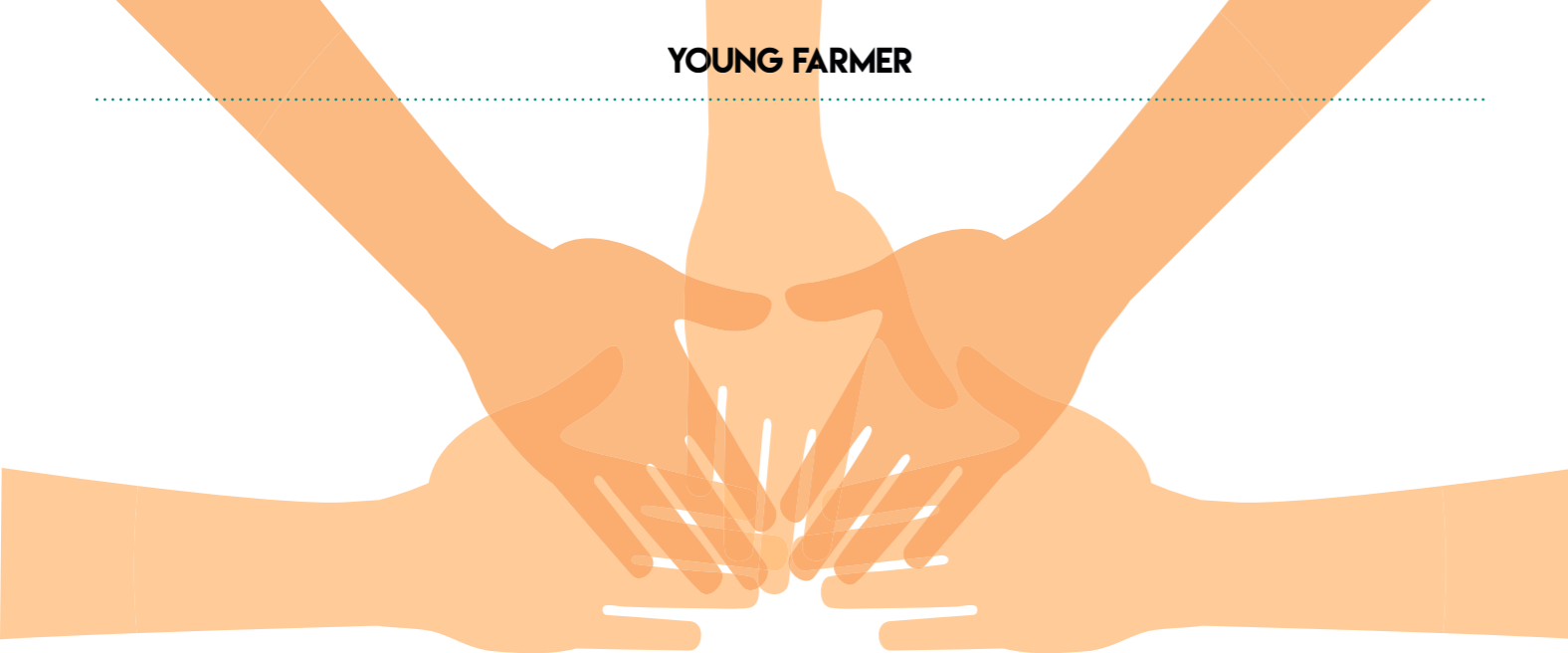
With pride and excitement in his voice he urged, "Ipagpatuloy lang nila ang kanilang magandang hangarin sa buhay. 'Wag nilang kalimutang lumingon sa kanilang pinanggalingan at 'wag magdamot kung ano ang kaalaman nila. Ibahagi ito sa iba dahil hindi naman 'yan mabubulok, bagkos dapat pagyabungin."

Alexander's success is the whole country's success. He is Alexander Paulo: the boy who shared his loaves and fish in agriculture.

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# Nature Friendly 4-H Club: A Peek In Their Outstanding Work

Larry Illich N. Souribio

Barangay Marobbob, Amulung, Cagayan is a far-flung area where the source of living is mostly derived from the agro-forestry. It has the most number of out-of-school youth among the barangays in the municipality.

That was before this exceptional club.

## Birth of a Champion

Recognizing their need for development, the youth of Marobbob organized the Nature Friendly 4-H Club. Assisted by the barangay captain and 4-H Volunteer Leaders Association of the Philippines (VLAP) member Achilles Lorenzana, the club was born on June 10, 2010. It has an initial member of 28 out-of-school youth. Their beginning was not that easy. They underwent a series of social preparations such as trainings and meetings in order to dispose them to commit strongly to their organization.

With their skills, knowledge, and motivation, they aimed to establish a vegetable garden as their initial income-generating project. Being young as they are, they did not have the land to which they will actually set up their vegetable production.

That was when Lorenzana offered his one-hectare land so that the Club has something to start with, provided that they use it for the sole purpose of having a communal garden.

With his assistance and the guidance of the agricultural extension workers, the Nature Friendly 4-H Club was able to source out planting materials from the local government unit (LGU) of Amulung.

## A budding beginning

As a humble start, the youth allotted one-fourth of the land for vegetables. Although water was one of the greatest challenges in their community, they maximized one water pump as their source for their newly established project. There, they started their vegetable production project in 2010. In the same year, they expanded by utilizing the

rest of the land for mungbean production. This simple project was the budding of what will become remarkable achievements of the Club.

These projects that ran from 2010 to 2011 cropping season generated an income of P11,200. The youth members considered this as their extraordinary achievement being beginners in their communal project.

With this, the youth become inspired to achieve greater excellence. They used the income and land that was lent to them to expand to other agricultural ventures. They reinvested and started their corn production in some parts of their land. Not only were they focused on agricultural activities, they also practice basic marketing. They started to venture in tamarind candy-making, rice retailing, and sari-sari store.



## Club meets ATI

When they presented their project proposal for a livelihood grant to the Agricultural Training Institute-Regional Training Center in Cagayan Valley (ATI-RTC II), their efforts were so noteworthy that their excellence in farm and project management was recognized. They were the recipient of the livelihood development assistance program amounting to P50,000 in 2011.

With this amount, they invested in a goat-raising project in 2012. With 11 heads of doe, the stock increased and, at present, they already have 49 heads. Apart from that, they also set an area for their fish production.

Recognizing the demands of sustaining their farming activities, they also engaged in organic farming. The organic wastes and animal manure that they collected were not disposed but turned into compost for their crops.

Their entrepreneurial and financial skills are put into use as they sell their farm produce. Through their sari-sari store, the people from their barangay go and buy directly from them. Their goat-raising project is gaining popularity, too, and people around the municipality personally go to them just to buy one for slaughter or if they also want to raise goats themselves.

As their agri-based projects flourished, they also expanded their non-agricultural ventures. In 2012, they have also engaged in hairdressing, manicure and pedicure, and T-shirt printing.

With these various enterprising activities that they have, they were able to quadruple their earnings from 2011 to 2014.

## Reaching out

As they maintain their activities, various stakeholders have recognized their achievements. They were able to expand their network to include the local barangay council, municipal and provincial LGUs, Department of Agriculture and ATI-RTC II. As role models in their community, they were tapped in many civic action activities. They are also the partners of their barangay in making developmental efforts and initiatives that are done in their community.

Their welfare not only for their club but also for its members doesn't stop there. One notable achievement of the Nature Friendly 4-H Club is their initiative in providing accident insurance to their individual members including their families. This is done by utilizing some of their income from their projects. Other than that, they also encourage the group members to go back to school.

As they continue to achieve excellence by attending trainings and seminars, they also help their community by hosting and re-echoing useful and practical topics as well. Their barangay officials also tap them in many social events like fiestas, tree-planting activities, and barangay beautification projects. As 4-H members, they also actively participate in 4-H activities like the provincial and regional youth camp.

## The club at present

During the 64th Farm Youth 4-H National Convention at Bohol Tropics Resort, Tagbilaran City, Bohol last May 18-22, 2015, they were awarded the Gawad Saka Most Outstanding Young Farmers' and Fisherfolk's Organization.

As of today, their plan to is to continue expanding their projects and establish a training site.

When asked about their edge as a winner, their reply was, "Be persistent and united. Cooperate well and learn to divide labor. Seek the support of the barangay and parents."

"We are happy as youth. Even though we are young, we can do something good and remarkable for our municipality," one member said.

"We learned how to help, to unite, to plant and to care for the environment," another added.

At present, the club has a total of 96 members, 88 of whom are in school and only 8 are out-of-school. They are headed by their Club President, Christian Neil Lorenzana. As a 4-H Club, they really embody the 4-H motto which is "To Make the Best Better." Their initiatives and efforts manifest the four-fold development of the head, heart, hands and health. They are role models especially that they also help their community grow along with them.