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BAHANDI NEXTGEN EDITION

A Collection of Inspiring Stories of Farmer Agripreneurs in Region X



BAHANDI

A Collection of Inspiring Stories of Young Farmers in Region X

NEXTGEN EDITION

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ABOUT THE COVER

There is power in number. It takes a village to raise a child. Such idioms mean that many people must be involved to achieve a desired goal.

With many mouths to feed, a declining interest to farm, and aging population of today's farmers, we hope for a better future where the next generation of farmers will take on the challenge and offer long term solutions to make the country food secure.

The next generation of farmers are full of promise and potential as they take on the mantle as the next generation's food provider. Like the bundle of interwoven abaca fibers in their background, the next generation is resilient, strong, world class and got some serious money-making skills. Gone are the days where traditional farmers rely on luck and happenstance.

The farmers of today are increasing their knowledge and skills on environmentally-sustainable agricultural techniques through social media and trainings held locally. They are also integral in achieving regional food security as well as the promotion of sustainable agriculture.

Sustainable agriculture gives the opportunity for the next generation farmers to know the right tools and the know-how they need through innovations like digital tools and other advancements to produce food, fuel and fiber.

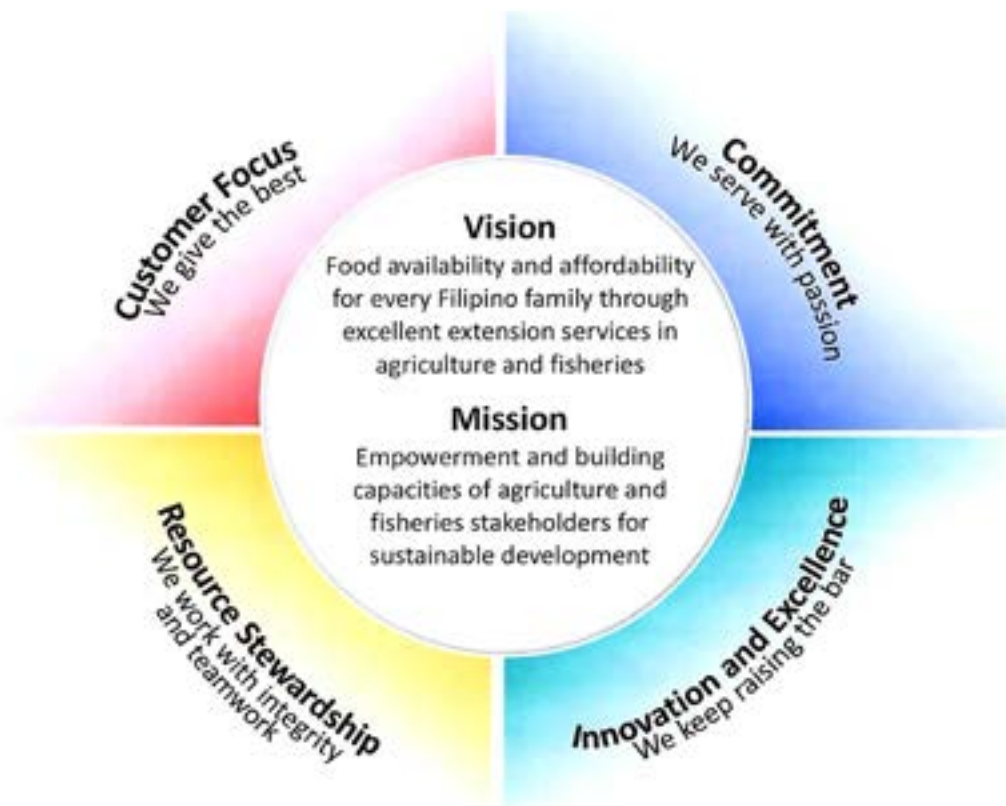
Agriculture development and food production are taking center stage in their work, with food security and sufficiency as their the constant aspiration.



QUALITY POLICY

"The Agricultural Training Institute leads in the professionalization of the Philippine agricultural extension service towards food security and prosperity."

We, in ATI, are committed to uphold our core values, reiterated as follows:



Editor's Message

Following our yearly publication of our farmers' success stories, we present to you another batch of inspiring stories from our next generation farmers.

Next generation farmers are those who identify as successors of an established and thriving farm by their farmer parent (s). Most of them, more or less, have farming experience having lived in the farm in their formative years.

In this edition, we have captured the stories of our next generation farmers who have decided and devoted their efforts to contribute and elevate the agriculture sector. Read the story and business tips of rice agripreneur Nick Jay Arr Engallado of Engallado's Nature Farm and Natural Food Products on page 23, or be inspired by VJ Tagupa who is influencing his neighboring community with organic agriculture practices through SAFE Young Organic Farmers on page 84. Both next generation farmers were featured in the pages of Manila Bulletin's Agriculture Monthly.

Other nextgen farmers include GreenMind Incorporated's community organizer and farmer trainer Lonalyn "Kenken" Sulatan on page 79, promising rabbit raiser Jan Pepito on page 63, rice farmer achiever April Malatamban on page 42, media practitioner and poultry farmer Bhal Cabrera on page 19, and architect and at the same time farmer Julie Ann P. Alvarez of SiaKeAn's Integrated Farm on page 11.

In this book, the next generation farmers have one common goal in mind which is to boost food productivity amidst the agriculture sector's aging farmers and growing number of consumers, by using new farming knowledge and technologies they get from legitimate information source.

We hope that the stories written herein and collected in this book will inspire more people and individuals to engage in farming and treat farming as part of their daily lives. We are also optimistic that through our extension work and services, more young farmers will become next generation farmers themselves despite modern day challenges and difficulties.

In return, how do we show support to our next generation farmers? We express our gratitude and support to our farmers by buying their farm produce and products.



VIC THOR A. PALARCA
Editor-in-Chief

Media Production Specialist-II
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Regional Training Center X

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There is no single answer on what motivates our farmers to engage in farming and take part in our trainings and extension programs. If we just say because of profit, there is more to it than that. In fact, other farmers (and farming enthusiasts) engage in farming just out of passion and plain love for agriculture.

The featured next generation farmers of this success story book, are mostly sons or daughters of the first generation of farmers who happens to be our farmer beneficiaries. A next generation farmer is someone who carries on the farming activity and legacy of their farmer parents.

Our next generation farmers, like most people, have a desire for fulfillment and sense of achievement. In addition to growing crops and accumulation of farming knowledge through trainings, what they contribute like sustainable agriculture and value-adding is beneficial to agricultural development and to our economy.

Ambition to succeed, personal desire to learn, usefulness of the training content, as well as satisfaction and fulfillment from their achievement is what drives our farmers to engage in farming.

Meanwhile, when asked what factors generally motivate our next generation farmers to engage in farming, the top five responses were: (1.) to have income, (2.) to learn the latest technology, (3.) to learn something new, (4.) to increase profitability, and (5.) because of the training content's accessibility.

Clearly, our next generation farmers are motivated by personal fulfillment and profit. It is the intention of this latest success story book, Bahandi NextGen Edition to inspire more young people to engage in farming, not only for profit but for personal fulfillment as well.

A circular portrait of Maria Lydia A. Echavez, a woman with long dark hair and glasses, wearing a white collared shirt and a dark jacket. The portrait is set against a green background with a leaf graphic on the right side.

MARIA LYDIA A. ECHAVEZ
OIC-CENTER DIRECTOR
ATI-RTC X

Message

My heartfelt felicitations to the management and staff of ATI Northern Mindanao for coming up with their latest success story book—Bahandi NextGen Edition.

I truly believe that our next generation of farmers are our future in making our country food-secure. While today's farmers are doing everything they can to produce the food we eat and provide food in our table, it is a wake-up call for us to realize that they are aging and that, soon enough, they will retire from their farming activities and from their daily motions of producing food.

Aside from the pressing issue of aging farmers, we are also challenged in encouraging the next generation of farmers who will soon be our food providers.

In my recent travel to Region X, I was fortunate to meet the owners of some of the Learning Sites for Agriculture (LSA) and had a conversation with them regarding their good practices, as well as some issues and concerns they are facing in their respective farms.

It was an eye-opener for me to visit Cervantes Squarefoot Gaden, Ysalina Farm, Venida Farm, Fabs Farm, JIKA Farm, JPL Farm, and Margeuries House of Goodies. Hearing them talk about their farming ventures gave me a sense of hope that organic farming in their side of the region is dynamic and very much alive. Still, the challenge remains.

In the Philippines, the average age of farmers is between 57 and 59 years old. It is a sad reality that many young Filipinos do not perceive agriculture as profitable or lucrative, and the future of farming is uncertain.

With the involvement of the next generation of farmers featured in this book, I have high hopes that our new breed of food heroes will set a good example to encourage people from all walks of life to invest in farming and engage in the development of the agriculture sector.



REMELYN R. RECOTER, MNSA, CESO III
OIC Director IV
Agricultural Training Institute

Another success story book from ATI Region 10? I am not surprised.

Over the years, Learning Sites for Agriculture (LSAs) in Northern Mindanao have seen a steady increase in number and, in fact, are the most that can be seen among the regions. These partners are invaluable sources of the Center's continuing efforts to generate and document successes in agriculture—with their latest collection of farmers' success stories in Bahandi NextGen Edition.

ATI Northern Mindanao is not new in the publish-or-perish arena of print publication, as they have consistently produced these kinds of books that can be a source of inspiration for those who want to farm and become the next generation of farmers.

The buzzword is “inspiration”. While I have personally met a handful of next generation farmers featured in this book, I have high hopes that they will continue to be passionate about farming and be an inspiration to those who are about to embrace the integral role of agriculture in our lives.

How can today's next generation of farmers inspire? Let me count the ways:

- Be an inspiration to get involved in the advocacy of smart and sustainable agriculture movement
- Be an inspiration and source of motivation, persistence, and learning
- Be an inspiration to carry out innovation to promote development and change
- Be an inspiration by being laser-focused in your intention and purpose

And while there are looming challenges such as climate change and the condition of our aging farmers, who are now in the brink of retirement, this next generation of young farmers are determined to step up and create lasting solutions.

May the success stories in farming—and nuggets of wisdom—contained here be a source of inspiration for farmers of any age!



Arceo
ANTONIETA J. ARCEO
OIC-Assistant Director
Agricultural Training Institute

Message

This edition of Bahandi, as the sixth compilation of success stories carries much hope and optimism. In this edition, we welcome and acknowledge new faces, as well as experienced farmers who are the country's next in line, or should I say, will be at the forefront of farming. I may never express enough but I am grateful to the countless farmers who tirelessly produce food for our table.

Over the changing course of seasons, farming remains a constant activity which entails hard work and diligence. If farmers stop producing food, the population would die from starvation. It is also ironic to know that some of today's young consumers do not have a clue where the food they ate comes from or a vague idea how a particular crop from a farm gets to our table.

It is the intention of this book to send a message to the readers that farmers are the backbone of our country. As unsung heroes, they rise with the sun and stay up late to tend to their crops. They are the collective group of men and women who work tirelessly under the heat of the sun, unpredictable weather, and even unfavorable circumstances to put food on our tables. Amid all the labor and toil they do, they remain steadfast in a thankless job.

Personally, the best way to thank our farmers is to buy their farm products and produce. Not buying their products is a direct disservice to all the things they do and efforts they have exerted. Patronizing and buying their products is a gesture of love to help them pay off their bills, buy their basic necessities, defray other expenses and even send their kids to school.

So, here's a big **THANK YOU** to our farmers for your hard work and dedication. Know that I am always amazed with what you are able to accomplish. It is because of your efforts that our hungry world is well-fed by the likes of you.

My heartfelt thank you also goes out to the next generation of farmers who are leading a new batch of dedicated farmers. Thank you and God bless you with good health, strength of character and fortitude to continue your noble work.



NOEMI BETH G. MACARIO
OIC-Assistant Center Director

Building business opportunities in Agriculture

by MARIA ELOISA A. AKUT



Aiming to become an exporter of cacao beans and other cacao-based products, Julie Ann works hard and is hopeful to attain her aspiration in the near future.

CACA



SiaKeAn's Integrated Farm's bestselling products include coconut-based and cacao-based products. They also have chili flakes, salabat, roselle jelly, and maize sinangag.

“Ang tableya sa farm, walay lasa”. So how can we market this? Also, we have glaring financial records with 200 heads of free-range chickens eating sackful of feeds a day, with no revenues at all!

The curiosity and the entrepreneurial mind of Julie Ann was triggered by the situations she witnessed in their farm, SiaKeAn's Integrated Farm (stylized as SiaKeAn), which was owned and operated by her mother. How come her mother continued to spend money with barely enough income to pay the laborers? She took these situations as challenges in farming which she thought is a way to help her mother's dream come true.

“My dream is for SiaKeAn's Farm to be an exporter of cacao beans and other products, to be a prime chicken meat producer, and a vegetable product consolidator in the province”. This is what Julie Ann answered when asked about her current plan in life.

A Strike of Fate

An architect by profession, Julie Ann P. Alvarez is the second child of Garlan L. Alvarez who is a seafarer for decades, and Sagrada P. Alvarez, a city agriculturist. She worked in a construction company for six years after graduating from Mapua University and after getting her license. Managing a team of architects honed Julie Ann's managerial skills to handle people and motivate them to work for the company's goals.

Trapped in the construction site for months because of Covid-19 pandemic, Julie Ann was granted a Christmas vacation and went home in Oroquieta City, Misamis Occidental. A strike of misfortune or fate, she became sick with pneumonia, thanks to her hardworking ways and city lifestyle. Hard work to a point of less or no sleep at all, she added.

“While recuperating, at first, I was just



The organic tableyas of SiaKeAn's are among the popular food products in the farm.

tending the flowers since I do not know anything about agriculture. But when I saw the hubbard chicken weighing an average of 3 kilos and eating up my mama's funds with no return, I suggested disposing of it. And voila! The 200 heads was sold in just two weeks!". That made Julie look into all other records of the farm and realized that it is not gaining profit at all.

The Biggest Challenge

The challenge she was facing then was how to make the farm productive and generate income. Seeing the cacao and tableya production as hav-

ing the lowest revenue product but with high potential, Julie Ann tried to improve it by introducing fermentation of the cacao beans. "I experimented with fermentation by watching videos on YouTube. I proudly declare that I am a graduate of YouTube University. Then I attended trainings organized by ATI. Why not avail all these free training programs?". The product did improve and she was able to market online through a popular app. With its new taste, the tableya made it through and online orders came pouring in. And that's when another challenge came. The market is not the problem now, it is the raw materials. Cacao beans from the farm are not enough to produce more tableya, and Julie Ann had to make excuses with the buyers. She can't supply them anymore. She tried to diligently apply the organic concoctions to bring more fruits to the cacao trees but still, the fruits are not enough.

Linkage and coordination are the keys, Julie Ann thought. And she tried it with the cacao



For the wine connoisseurs, SiaKeAn's Roselle Wines are sweet, vibrant, and fruity.

farmers in one of the meetings. She offered them almost double the price of the cacao beans they are currently selling. “Pero mura gawa sila nituo sa ako. Tingali abi nila gabinuang man ning anak ni Diding” (It seems they did not believe me. Maybe they thought this daughter of Diding is joking). This is one of the current experiences some young farmers are facing when dealing with the older and experienced ones in the field.

Such complexity did not stop Julie Ann to pursue her plan of getting big with cacao production. She approached the cacao farmers in the neighborhood and started buying their beans at a higher price to boost their supply of raw materials. With patience and perseverance, more meetings and linkages with farmers are coming

up, and by now, surely, SiaKeAn’s tableya is back to online business.

A Handful of DIYs

The selling of the 200 heads of Hubbard chicken in two weeks inspired Julie Ann to find time to watch for YouTube do-it-yourself videos of an egg incubator, to produce more chicks. She was able to create a 360 capacity incubator and is now producing more chicks for meat production. The mass production of chicken will fulfill her dream of becoming the supplier of organically grown chicken, which health-conscious customers are very much willing to patronize. Again, a training on free-range chicken with ATI supplemented her limited knowledge in agriculture.



More to Go

A lot has yet to be done in the farm according to Julie Ann. The ongoing vegetable production with short-term crops provide sustainable income, but the dream of consolidating all the vegetable crops in the area for a greater market, and to help the vegetable farmers has just started in the neighborhood. Hence, it has yet to grow big. On the other hand, what gives a greater current income for SiaKeaAn's Integrated Farm are the coconut trees. The dwarf coco seedlings give the farm a weekly income of 7,000 pesos. Added to it is the income from the coco sugar, the spicy coco vinegar, and the coco sauce out of the water from the matured coconuts. All these are yet to be improved and made sustainable to achieve the dream of becoming a truly sustainable Learning Site for Agriculture (LSA).

Alongside these grappling for technical know-how in agriculture, Julie has to manage the paper works. Her mother dreamed of the farm becoming an ATI-certified LSA, and a certified organic farm. These are already in place. And by now, SiaKeaAn's Integrated Farm is already a Food and Drug Administration (FDA)-certified for its spicy vinegar and cacao tableya, ready for display in malls and bigger markets.

She has to Say

“The human brain is most powerful. What you think is what you will become. If you give, give your all. Don't give up”.

“Be bold, be dynamic, be radical”. On this, Julie Ann expounded, that we have to fight for what we think is right, be strong on our

stand, be open to suggestions, and adjust to changes in the environment. These she believes, are her guiding principles, which she now gives as a challenge to those who are yet to start a farming business.

Being one of the next-generation farmer-agripreneurs in the region is a great service to the agriculture sector. And ATI-RTC X pens its hope for this young architect to be one of the great agribusiness women and prime movers in the field of agriculture.

For more of SiaKeaAn's Integrated Farm, visit their official Facebook account here: <https://www.facebook.com/siakeans>





Rollins shares a snap of their typical day in the farm with family.

Bukidnon nextgen farmer considers cardava banana as a life saver

by Chelsea L. Asifero

Bananas are such multi-purpose fruits. No matter the maturity, you can literally do anything with it and it will turn into a delicacy. Banana candies, jams, purees, and chips, to name a few (of the many delights). Did I mention that the banana ketchup was originally a Filipino-made recipe? Who would have thought it would be such a good alternative to tomatoes? Bananas are also a go-to snack for students or workers



Nextgen farmer Rollins Caballero giving his father Rudy a hand in the proper handling of their cardava banana when harvesting.

after working hours, the sweet crunch of banana cues, turon or maruya or even the buttery sweet flavor of ginanggang that rests on one's palate.

The Leny Rudy Caballero (LRC) Diversified Farm offers an impressive banana plantation situated at Malitbog, Bukidnon. Owned by Rodulfo "Rudy" Caballero and wife Eleneta Caballero, this Learning Site for Agriculture (LSA) of the Agricultural Training Institute-Regional Training Center X (ATI-RTC X) thrives not only in banana cardava but also in organic concoctions, organic pigs, tilapia fishpond, and in implementing Farmer Field Schools (FFS).

One of their children, Rollins, regularly assists his father in managing the farm. Having lived and experienced the hardships of their family, his testimony proves the bright side brought by persistence.

Before investing in bananas, the family had a fair share of trial-and-error, venturing from one plantation to another. The Cabal-

leros' initial livelihood was corn production.

Rollins recalled he would help out in farm chores as a child. Harrowing, scything, and harvesting corn on fields were his and his older brothers' weekend routine. They would follow their mother around and assist her. "Kung asa si mama mag trabaho, tua sad kami magtabang." He shared.

However, their corn harvest is not exchanged in monetary value. At the age of 7, he clearly remembers having to carry 3 gallons of corn and walk for 7 kilometers to barter the harvested corn for bulad (dried fish). For them it was a matter of survival. Even so, the corn livelihood was not conducive with their area of steep and sloping landscape. Considering it as a loss, they ventured into cassava and abaca. The crops were supposedly good for generating income, but they discovered that the said commodities' shelf life is not that good.

The family did not stop after experiencing failure after failure in their farming ven-

tures. Crops may decompose but not the family's fighting spirit and persistence. They attempted their luck in bananas, and this time, circumstances favored them as the buying price of the fruit rose also.

Fast forward to becoming an ATI - Learning Site for Agriculture (LSA) and a TESDA accredited School for Practical Agriculture (SPA), it was a farming journey not many bear witness of the family's struggle in terms of experiencing failures and dealing with the naysayers.

As they pursued banana farming, Rudy Caballero was invited in 2009 to participate in the search for Most Outstanding Cardava Banana Farmer of the Year by the Department of Agriculture (DA) in Malitbog, Bukidnon. As the stars aligned for them, Rudy won not just for that year but up until 2011. He earned the title, "Hall of Farmer" and was recommended to be a Magsasakang Siyentista under DOST-PCARRD.

The Caballero family now earns an average of 10 thousand pesos a month, and can even double their monthly income if factoring in their bestselling banana chips and a bountiful harvest from their tilapia fishpond.

In terms of discipline, hard work, and persistence, Rollins look up to his father Rudy as the paragon of a working family man, and a farmer at that. Qualities he wants to emulate and become successful on his own in the near future.

Rollins have witnessed both his father and mother's struggle and hardships. He wants to continue the progress of his parents and even expand more on the farm. At present their target is to become a tourism site in Malitbog, and to gain more clients as well as widen their market.

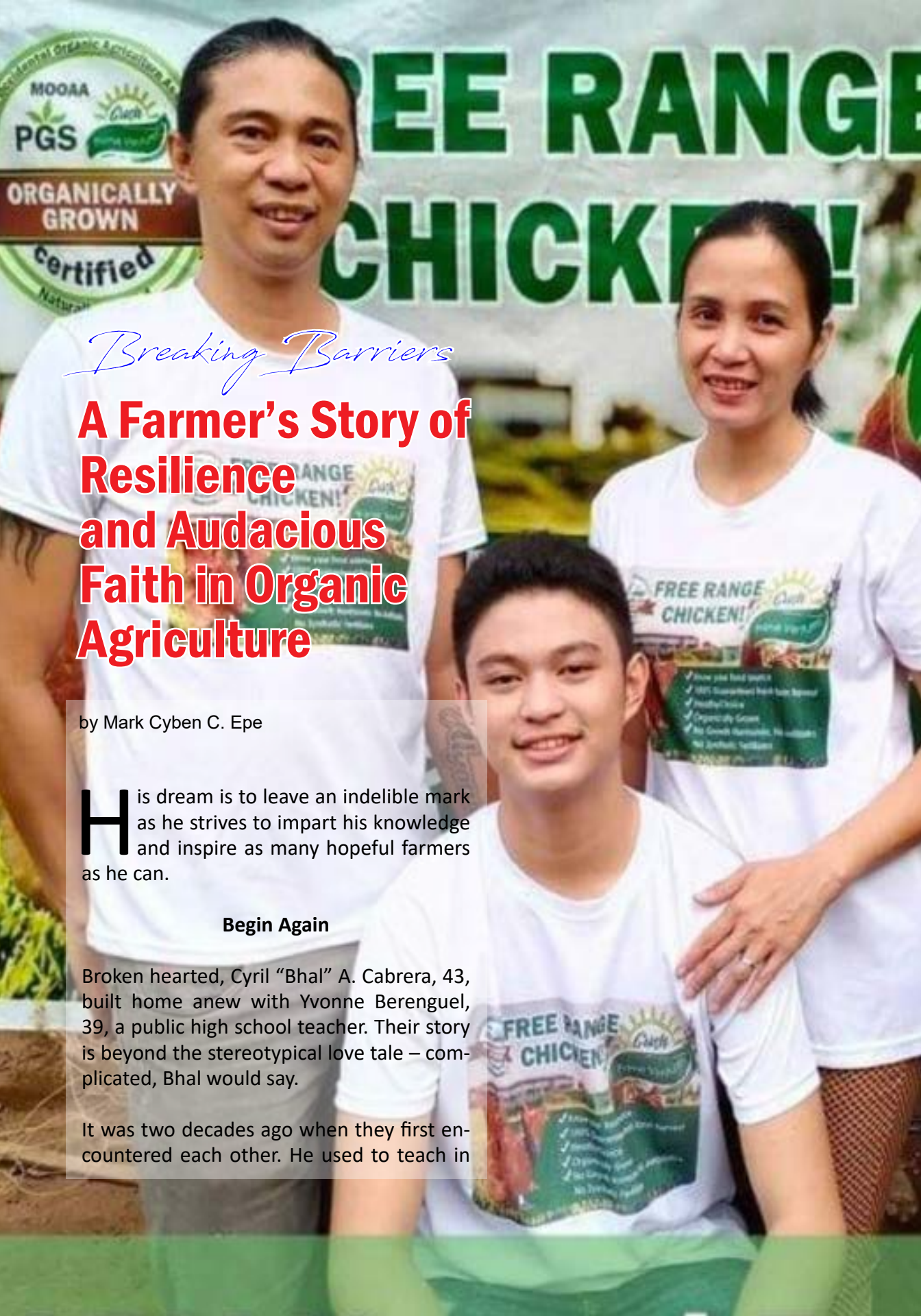
The farming journey of the Caballero family proved that success is not dependent on social status, but on hard work and persistence.

"Bisan pa ug wala ka naka-graduate ug kolehiyo basta maayu kalang mu-diskarte, mas mapalambo pa nimo ang imung pag venture sa agriculture." Rollins said.

For more of LRC Diversified Farm and banana processing, watch the episode 28 of our Season 1 AgriStoryahay sa ATI via this link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tHdHKqO1Soc>



A screenshot of Rudy Caballero of LRC Farm showing the final product of their banana chips. Value added ensured additional income in their family.



FREE RANGE CHICKEN!

Breaking Barriers

A Farmer's Story of Resilience and Audacious Faith in Organic Agriculture

by Mark Cyben C. Epe

His dream is to leave an indelible mark as he strives to impart his knowledge and inspire as many hopeful farmers as he can.

Begin Again

Broken hearted, Cyril “Bhal” A. Cabrera, 43, built home anew with Yvonne Berenguel, 39, a public high school teacher. Their story is beyond the stereotypical love tale – complicated, Bhal would say.

It was two decades ago when they first encountered each other. He used to teach in

Outside his farm life and activities, Bhal can be heard via Radyo Asenso 106.7 News FM.



Musika At Iba Pa

PODCAST

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8 PM - 10 PM

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Radyo Asenso 106.7 News FM

University of Mindanao–Davao Campus and Yvonne was his former student.

Years have passed and their worlds completely grew apart. He fell in love, got married, and had a child. She, on the other hand, shared the same. His married life wasn't as successful as he thought it would be. His heart was shattered but



As a farmer and radio broadcaster, Bhal delivers development and agriculture-related news to reach out to more listeners in the countryside.

chose to be hopeful. She, with the passing of her husband, was left alone.

Fate, with all the mysteries we dare not fathom, reunited them. With hearts rekindled, both were ready to begin again.

Brighter Perspectives

Cush, 15, became the couple's apple of the eye. He is a blessing they have prayed for.

Every father's dream is to give his child the best he deserves. Sometime in 2018, Bhal delved into agriculture and started cultivating the land his wife owns in Tangub City, Misamis Occidental. It was the birth of the Cush Prime Ventures (CPV) Natural Farm.

His earnest desire to produce healthy farm products made him research for technologies available on YouTube. Back then, he had little to no knowledge about farming at all. Soil composition and proper irrigation system were new to him. The farm was barely thriving even after a couple of tries. Finances were scarce and their faith was definitely tested.

With such difficulties, he was in the verge of giving up until he learned about the programs of the Agricultural Training Institute – Regional Training Center X (ATI-RTC X).

The first training he participated in was a training on organic chicken production facilitated by Agriculturist Javier P. Andalan, in Hoyo-hoy, Misamis Occidental. He was able to assess his knowledge and was indeed thankful for the lessons and skills he acquired. After such, he developed a clearer and better vision for his farm. This was his first step to redeeming himself, and discovering his love for farming.

Best Practices

After applying the technologies he learned from the couple of trainings of ATI, CPV was gradually earning. Everyone in the family helps to man the farm. Bhal makes sure that his son also appreciates the importance of farming.

He further ventured in organic chicken production specifically for meat type. He was deeply grateful to former Governor and



entrepreneur Loreto Leo S. Ocampos who served as his big brother, and mentor in terms of becoming a business-savvy individual.

At the moment, Bhal's farm sources out its broods from Bounty Progeny. However, the feeds are solely formulated by him. He keeps on innovating and aims to gain more knowledge through various trainings.

ATI-RTC X officially certified CPV Nature Farm as a Learning Site (LS) in 2020, during the height of the pandemic. It was also granted financial assistance for the enhancement of its training hall and dormitory as the farm aims to hold trainings to farmers and to those who are interested to venture in agriculture. After all, knowledge sharing is also one of his passions, especially organic agriculture.

Beam of Light

The onset of Covid-19 has brought about a lot of tribulations especially to poultry farmers. To CPV farm, the limited number of brood supplies in the market has directly affected them. Sales have dramatically gone down.

Despite that, Bhal remains positive. The industry projects that on the fourth quarter of 2022, supplies will slowly go up and the farm will surely be gaining again.

Perhaps, this was a blessing in disguise. It made 106.7 Farm Radio happen. This program is also streamed on Channel 15 - a local TV channel in Misamis Occidental.

Bhal takes pride on it as it is the fruit of all his hard work and sacrifices. By far, it is the first farm radio that delivers agriculture-related topics, development news, as well as promote the projects and programs of ATI in the province---a trailblazer in his own right.

When asked about his aspiration, he said, "I really want to help my fellow farmers and the young generations to appreciate organic agriculture, or agriculture in general." He strongly believes that encouraging people as many as he can to appreciate and get into farming is an essential part of nation building.

Loud and proud, he concluded, "For without farms, we will have no food on our tables."

Bruised but unbroken – this is Bhal. His heart may have cracks but remained whole. He is both brave and empathetic and never allowing the barricades to ever stop him towards achieving his dream.



Through Cush Prime Ventures (CPV) Natural Farm, Bhal aspires to always provide organic and healthy poultry (and meat) products to its customers.



LEARN ORGANIC RICE FARMING

Rise with Rice:

5 Agripreneurial Tips from a NextGen Rice Farmer

by Vic Thor Palarca

Bukidnon-based Nick Jay Arr Engallado is making a name for himself in their hometown's farming community as a next generation farmer.

A next generation farmer is someone who carries on the farming activity and legacy of one's farmer parents (or at least from an immediate family member). Next generation farming is a farming approach which aims to attain sustainability, with the "farm-to-plate" end in mind.

As the eldest son of rice king and

Engallado Nature Farm's winning entry during the Digital Farmer's Program 102.

Engallado's

Sto. Niño Tongantongan, Valencia City
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At Rescuer's Stop, lounging and ready for the day's opening. The food hub which is located in Valencia City, Bukidnon is popular among patrons for its arroz caldo and pork batchoy.

award-winning farmer, the late Nicasio “Nick” F. Engallado, this passionate agripreneur in Valencia City, Bukidnon, shares his venture in rice value-adding, his early beginnings, his already established food joint and one-stop shop, as well as tips for up-and-coming agripreneurs.

Solo Outing

A graduate of Development Communication (DevCom) at Xavier University - Ateneo de Cagayan, Nick Jay Arr's savvy communication skills and eye for design prompted him to gain work experience, as well as share his expertise in Progressive Farm Development with GreenHouse Homestay, a non-government organization in Cambodia from 2016 to 2020.

As an organic practitioner, some of the farming technologies Nick Jay Arr has adopted include sustainable agriculture, value-adding, business planning, and solid waste management. The practice of organic farming led him to sustain the family's

farm which serves as their food and income source, as well as source ingredients of their processed food products.

At present, Nick Jay Arr is an active member of the League of Organic Agriculture Municipalities and Cities of the Philippines (LOAMC-PH) where he serves as their project manager. The organization holds various meetings and conventions in different parts of key cities/municipalities across the country promoting organic agriculture through safe farming methods and technologies.

Rescuer's Stop

Sometime in November 2013, Rescuer's Stop by Engallado's was launched in Valencia City. Rescuer's Stop is a food hub that caters healthy food items ranging from snacks, combo meals, comfort food, and rice-based products to patrons. Inspired by his travels abroad especially in Cambodia, Rescuer's Stop was conceptualized and established with the idea in mind that it will offer respite to tired and hungry backpackers.

As the manager of Rescuer's Stop, their house specialties include the traditional Ilonggo comfort food batchoy and arroz caldo. Their tasty pork batchoy is one of the best sellers because of its fresh ingredients and cooked without MSG. Their arroz caldo is prepared from multi-colored rice or mixture of available rice colors, making it vibrant and appealing to hungry customers.

Nick Jay Arr strives to provide quality rice-based products and mouthwatering house specialties by using their farm produce since he aims for quality and sustainability. Striving for a quality and affordable rice-based products, Nick confided that he intends to maintain the productivity of their farm where all, if not most, of Rescuer's Stop's ingredients and value-added products will come from. The said food hub opens from 10:00AM and closes at 8:00PM.

Greentag

Another component under Engallado's Farm & Natural Food Products is Greentag, which serves as one-stop shop for its organically grown rice-based delicacies.

The organically-grown rice delicacies are a popular choice among local and foreign tourists alike that visit their farm and their shop. Among the rice-based bestsellers include barquirice and rice coffee which were developed with the help of the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), Department of Science and Technology (DOST), and the Agricultural Training Institute (ATI).

For those who are health conscious and on a strict diet, be sure to book for an advance reservation to avail of the farm's brown, red, and black rice.

Farming Advocacy in Time of the Pandemic

Nick Jay Arr remained unfazed in pursuing his love for farming. In fact, the pandemic brought him the opportunity to reach out more albeit virtually, using various means of video conferencing platforms such as zoom meetings, google meet, as well as attending a series of teleradyo guestings.



During the height of the pandemic, Nick Jay Arr was busy and preoccupied in attending online speaking engagements as resource person for rice-related topics and knowledge sharing on value-adding.

Most notable of all was his sharing of family farm entrepreneurial experiences at the Philippine Embassy in Seoul on Organic Farming and Agri-enterprise, Organic Agriculture Foundational Course of IFOAM-Asia, RCEF-RESP-FFS with TESDA, a series of ATI training on Agri-enterprise, and guesting at DZRH Teleradyo.

"The sharing focused on our approach that is "from farm to shelves" and later on highlighted our way to sustain the different initiatives upon tatay's passing.

The challenge was not totally with the impact of the pandemic but how we had to continue-on with the plans tatay had left us that is not entirely for the family but for the farming community to continue to learn from our family's experience in sustainable agriculture so small-scale farmers will take pride of themselves and grow in understanding, skills, and the ability to sustain the needs of their respective families", Nick Jay Arr said.

Before the pandemic, Nick Jay Arr earns at least 20 thousand pesos a month. It went down to 13 thousand pesos during the pandemic (and is slowly growing as of writing). While Rescuer's Stop fetches 60 thousand pesos a month.

His Father's Legacy: A Million for a Hectare of Organic Rice

According to Nick Jay Arr, a million for a hectare of rice was a documented experience and at the same time a farmer's study of his late father Nicasio, whose aim was to transform farmers' mindset from production-oriented to be product-oriented in order to command the price of his or her farm produce that small-scale farmers are deprived of in the value chain.

The whole experience focused on the ability of a hectare of rice farm to generate or earn a million pesos that was made possible through value-addition. The computa-

tion was based on the preparation of rice blend wherein an average 4T of rice when processed and sold at 8.00 per 15 grams will earn 1,200,000.00 pesos.

Tips for Budding Agripreneurs

While there is no magic formula for success in whatever value-adding business one pursues, Nick Jay Arr shared some tips and pointers below for up-and-coming entrepreneurs:

1. **Invest on quality** - Take the time to check for competitors and compare their products. Check on the qualities in terms of ingredients used and decide what will be the edge of your product.
2. **Innovate** - Upscale your product creatively to keep up with the competition, and to keep your business afloat.
3. **Fair pricing** – Although I always use the best ingredients on my rice-based products, I also make sure that it is affordable

since the ingredients are locally-sourced. This makes patrons and consumers embrace your products at an affordable price for the same good quality.

4. **Continue learning** – Continue learning since learning is dynamic and make sure to apply such learning. Learn from experience and always aspire for self-improvement.

5. **Hard work pays off** – The business plan you have in mind, or that awesome product/service you want to cater will not transpire if you do not work for it.

For more of Engallado's Nature Farm & Natural Food Products, check out their official Facebook business page here: <https://www.facebook.com/engalladosnaturefarms>

This article was also published in Manila Bulletin and Agriculture Magazine online and in their July 2022 issue.

DZRH | TOPIC: **Rice-based Products**

Nick Jay Arr Engallado
Owner, Engallado's Nature Farm and Natural Food Products
Valencia, Bukidnon

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AgriAsenso
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ALGOA+4
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2019.9.18(수) - 9.20(금)

Nick Jay Arr as an invited speaker over DZRH to discuss about rice-based products in their AgriAsenso radio program.

For Nick Jay Arr, attending forums and trade expos abroad like the Organic Trade Expo in Goesan County, Korea is one way of expanding his knowledge and at the same time share his expertise as well.

This MisOcc Teen sets eyes on a career in Farming and Food Technology

by Chelsea L. Asañero

Is it possible for someone so young to radiate so much confidence and self-assurance while maintaining such a sweet and pleasing demeanor? With the eldest daughter of Mark Anthony and Reggie Macahilo, it is. And her name's Dorothy.

Seeing Doty, as she would like to be called, approach and greet us wearing light blue plaid sleeves, paired with cowboy boots and a hat - so chic! Doty's aura spoke even before she did. Indeed a fair mixture of magnetic appeal and meekness at only 17 years old.

No to idle Land

Next generation farmer Dorothy M. Macahilo recalled that their farm land was once a dumping site owned by her grandmother. It was supposedly up for sale, but her moth-

Dorothy's love for farm animals is apparent as she poses with their farm goats.



No fowl play here as Dorothy inspects and collects eggs for sale and consumption

er Reggie, who had a keen liking to planting, thought it would be such a waste to give the farm's potential to someone else. Reggie took the initiative to manage it herself, accompanied by her husband who has a profound knowledge on farm management due to his family's history. Hence, MR. DEGA FARM in Manga, Tangub City, Misamis Occidental was established, and is a certified Learning Site for Agriculture (LSA) partner of the Agricultural Training Institute – Regional Training Center X (ATI-RTC X) for three years now.

Early farming experience

While most girls her age would most likely care about teenage stuff, Dothy's childhood was spent early on in their farm. She gained first-hand experience of the farm animals' growth, describing it as a fond memory to live by. Being the eldest among five siblings, Dothy came foremost to have been taught the farm's ups and downs, and all its nitty gritty. She recalled that at six years old, her mom would take her and her siblings to sell pre-packed vegetables that they would carry over her head in a winnower (nigo). They would each then have percentages of the income. Since she was

taught at an early age to market products, she got used to it.

If one would imagine teenagers nowadays, one would visualize glossy lips, curled lashes, a smartphone in hand, a tote bag on a shoulder---all packed up for school. But in Dothy's case, remembering at age 13, she readied for school with school supplies on a backpack and bayongs in each hand, filled with vegetables and eggs, all prepped for both learning and selling. The teachers would fancy her, especially the quality of products she offered and eventually become her suki. From helping her mother sell vegetables and eggs at the age of 6, she gets a percentage of the income.

Life as a student and a nextgen farmer

Just like any other farms or business ventures, oversupply can be such a burden. When products do not do well in the market, they find other means to sell it. Oftentimes, eggs not sold in the market would be sold to her aunt who owns a bakery, and if not, they would simply give the rest to their close family members or use it up for their own consumption.



Nextgen farmer Dorothy Macahilo proves that farming is fun and fulfilling.

During the pandemic which brought everyone a great deal of dread, as well as with lockdowns and home quarantine protocols, they still get to help her parents. Doty and two of her siblings would each be assigned to a farm cow, taking responsibility in making sure it is grass-fed. By the time their cow gets sold to the market, they would each get a percentage out of the profit. She described that it was never a burden to help her family, in fact, she gets a lot of fun taking care of her cow.

At present, every sibling, except her two-year old younger brother, has an area in the farm to tend for. Dorothy is in charge of feeding the chickens, even the newly hatched, as well as harvesting quail eggs and layer eggs.

Being a Senior High School student, she too, has school obligations. She makes an effort to be able to juggle everything in between. She mentioned feeding her designated farm animals at 7:30 AM, then heads out for school at 12:00 noon. As she gets home by 6:00 PM, she feeds them again for the second time. Way to go Dorothy!

To date, as Dorothy nears college, she hopes to pursue Bachelor in Science in Food Technology. Not only does she have a keen interest for food and cooking, she also deemed it as an advantage for their farm,

especially in product formulation and preservation. Unfortunately, the course is not available anywhere in the Province of Misamis Occidental. Even so, Dorothy, with clear conviction, shared that her mother fully trusts her in leaving home for school for a while, because her mother herself taught her to be independent. Thus, all she have to do is to weigh her choices, and deliberate with the course and school offerings.

“Di ko gusto nga mawala ang gi-haguan sa akong mama ug papa.” When asked about the future, all she longs for is to preserve the legacy her parents spent blood and tears on.

“Dili dapat ikaulaw kung unsa ang naa ninyo, kung unsa inyong gi dakoan.” She added that there is no such thing as a small deed. No matter how simple you think your actions are, trust that time will lead you to a bigger and grander outcome only if you keep working for it. She also called for young people to find their interest. “Once you find it, just go for it and focus on it”, Doty concluded.

For more info about MR. DEGA FARM, check out their official Facebook page here: <https://www.facebook.com/mr.degafarm>



Nextgen farmer Dorothy as interviewed by AO-IV Eren C. Macario

Former OFW nurse is now a successful dairy farmer

by Chelsea L. Asifnero
(with reports from
Efren C. Macario)

Did you know that 7.2% of registered nurses in the United States of America are Asians? Another interesting fact is that 4% of the Asian nursing workforce are Filipinos. Whether it's to improve economic conditions, or to live the American Dream, the number of Filipinos working abroad continues to rise.

Meet Nerea May Maghuyop, one of the 4% registered nurses in the USA. She and her husband, Hector, a certified public accountant in the Philippines, lived in the US from 1985 until retirement



Nerea keeps track of her dairy cows at Almans God's Gift Foundation Farm.



Nerea showing their bestselling milk bars. Milk bars are among the in-demand dairy products in their farm.

last 2019. And while some overseas Filipino workers invest in real estate properties and businesses, the couple chose to give their time and money to establish their farm, Alman God's Gift Foundation Incorporated Farm located in Mansabay Alto, Lopez Jaena, Misamis Occidental.

The said farm land was a property in the 1920s by Nerea's grandparents, Vicente R. Baz Sr. and Engracia T. Baz. Eight of their children inherited the land of 15 hectare rice field, 15 hectare coco land, 40 hectares fishpond and 7 hectare of integrated fishpond and rice field. Even if some pursued natural farming, the land was affected by poor irrigation and saline waters resulting in it being forested and neglected.

The couple desired for the future generation to enjoy a naturally-farmed area, thus purchasing some portions of the coco land and fishponds in the early 2000s. This then developed into what the Alman God's Gift Foundation Incorporated Farm is now. In 2019 upon returning to the country, they

gambled their hard-earned money into the development of the farm. And in 2020, it became a Learning Site for Agriculture (LSA) of the Agricultural Training Institute-Regional Training Center X (ATI-RTC X).



Aside from dairy cows, these goats are also Alman Farm's source of creamy fresh milk.

100 %

Cow's Milk!

Fresh & Delicious

MILK BAR

FLAVORS

CHOCOLATE
STRAWBERRY
BUKO PANDAN
MANGO
MELON
UBE

ALMAN FARM

MANSABAY ALTO,
LOPEZ JAENA, MIS. OCC.



Milk bars in different flavors

“Nag sugod among pag-uma aron makaon namo among gusto kaonon.” She explained that every time they visit the Philippines, they would want to try different fruits and vegetables. Most of the time, however, it is not readily available in the market or even if it is, chemical use as pesticide is always in question. That then is the reason why they plant their own, to have it readily available within reach and to ensure it was a product of natural farming. She continued to narrate that at one time, she planted two packs of eggplant seedlings bought by her husband, and were overwhelmed by a basketful of eggplants upon harvest. Deeming it excessive for personal consumption,

they decided to sell those they could not consume. “The experience of selling it was fun.” She said.

Just like any other farms, they frequently encounter pest infestation. It has been such a struggle for them considering they refuse to use chemicals to kill harmful pests. Having said this, they plan to prolong partnership with the University of the Philippines – Los Baños (UPLB) professor, Dr. Celia Medina, which they have been partnering with for an annex farm that has 300 mango trees. Purchasing biological control products from the Depart-



Chocolate flavored goat's milk

ment of Agriculture (DA) - Misamis Occidental and Bukidnon, was likewise her option to solve the problem once and for all. Alman's Farm offers a variety of fruits and vegetables, cultivated through organic farming. At present, they have been working towards securing an organic certification.

Nerea has such high hopes for the future. She envisions stronger confidence between the farm and its clients, and she is now also working on acquiring an FDA-approved processing facility. They have recently acquired designation from TESDA as a certified farm school for organic ruminant production.

Visiting the area, we were able to stop by the thriving dairy farm consisting of both local and foreign cow breeds. She also

showcased their dairy products, such as mozzarella, cheddar cheese, and butter. Upon entering their home, you would be welcomed with four huge chest freezers all filled with different flavors of milk bars, with their pasteurized cow's milk as the main ingredient.

“You have to have passion for farming, to be able to enjoy it.” Owning such a huge and thriving area, her advice for those who would want to venture into farming is to put their heart into their work. She added, being open to learning current and scientific information. True enough, as the world evolves, methods and technologies have been advancing so fast. “Dili pwede e-rely nimo sa imohang na andan.” she said. And lastly, she placed so much emphasis on camaraderie and appreciation for the people around her. “You cannot do



Goat cheese and grapes for a simple feast.

it by yourself, you have to make use of the available resources around the community. Your neighbors, your workers are very important for your business. You have to work with the whole team in order to be successful". Alman God's Gift Foundation Incorporated Farm continues its mandate to encourage farmers to use organic and natural farming. Nerea is also striving for the farm to be an eco-tourism destination, to raise climate change awareness, and the importance of natural preservation. As young people's interest in agriculture de-

clines, they hope to allow the future generation to see the beauty of a self-sufficient future.

"Although we have witnessed the growing interest of the Filipino people in working outside the country, it would be more satisfying if we get to revel in the land of our own. And that's only possible if this generation fosters and protects nature for the good of generations to come", Nerea concluded.



Fresh and pasteurized, the creaminess of milk beckons patrons and consumers to have a glass of dairy goodness.

AMOR'S NEWFOUND Love for Farming

by Honeylou C. Bastasa

Her career aspiration was to finish school, take the accountancy board exam, hit abroad as an OFW, and support her parents financially. When things did not go as planned, she responded to a different calling, a calling closer to home.

A Love of Mountains and Horses

When Amor was 13 years old, she was awarded as Lady Rider of the Year in 2006 by the Philippine Horseman Federation in Cebu City. That same year, she was also adjudged as the Champion in the Obstacle Race (Ladies Division) during the Kabayo Festival, a National Horseshow and Competition organized by the LGU of Mandaue.





Amor with husband Vince in one of the agri trade fairs they have participated.

Amor's interest in nature and animals were heightened at an early age. Most of her adventures in the farm were spent in helping out house chores and riding horses. Her interest in horse riding was instinctive, since father Benjohn was into it, both as a hobby and a professional horseman.

As the eldest child of Benjohn and Grace Mahistrado, Amor has witnessed firsthand the fun and function of a family farm through Alomah's Place and Nature Farm in Dahilayan, Bukidnon.

Establishing Alomah's Place and Nature Farm in 2015 was not a walk in the park. Benjohn and Grace had to work on odd jobs and get their hands busy on other opportunities to make ends meet. Amor had witnessed firsthand what her parents have gone through to make the farm what it is today.

With an initial farm area of two hectares in which is now called Area 1 back in 2015,

it has presently expanded with Area 2, a one-hectare area, and Area 3, a four-hectare area in a matter of five years. Area 2 is the expansion of their lettuce and other high value crops, while Area 3 is dedicated to other crops such as abaca, taro, coffee, and livestock such as chicken, goats, cows and more thoroughbred horses.

With their flourishing family farm and bigger plans waiting to materialize, the Mahistrados envisioned to establish succession in the family, not just for productivity but for sustainability.

At the moment, Alomah's Place and Nature Farm is one of the successful farms, in terms of productivity and agritourism in Northern Mindanao. The farm settled in the beautiful pineapple-abundant Municipality of Manolo Fortich, Bukidnon at Barangay Dahilayan. (for more of Alomah's, read here: <https://www.agriculture.com.ph/2019/02/14/alomahs-allure-shifting-passion-to-attraction/>)



Amor with proud farmer parents Benjohn and Grace Mahistrado during an agri-fair at the Centrio Mall in Cagayan de Oro City.



Amor, with younger brother Dave, selling their best-selling ready-to-eat lettuce salads and vinaigrettes in one of the numerous agri trade fairs and exhibits the Mahistrados have attended in Metro CDO.



Amor with their family horse "Bossing" at the Horse Show in General Santos where she won a back to back win in the Ladies Division in both Barrel and Obstacle Category.

Surviving Setbacks

"I have never envisioned myself as a full-time farmer. My original plan was to be an accountant, and to work abroad. That is how I perceived success and that was my only way to help my family," Amor said,

her voice soft and steady against the cold Bukidnon breeze.

Amor earned her Bachelor of Science in Accountancy degree at the University of the Philippines-Iloilo in 2015. As earlier planned, she immediately had her review for the Certified Board Examination and took the exam that same year. Although she did not pass the examination, she never gave up. She tried for the second time, but failed again.

Rather than sulking over her failures, she tried chasing her dreams again. She worked at the Luxe Hotel in Cagayan de Oro City for six months as one of their accounting staffs. It was what she thought as the beginning of her journey towards her dream career. A dream she have, not just for herself, but for her love to her family and the goal of giving them a better life.

"I thought at first that this is what I really wanted [job], but I never felt the satisfaction and fulfillment I thought I would have." she added.

"I was tired and burnout from making plans that don't work at all", Amor quipped with a wry smile.

Amor realized that after all the struggles, she was in dire need of rest. She stayed at their farm for a while, when one day, her mother asked her to attend a Mindanao-wide training on organic agriculture sponsored by the Agricultural Training Institute (ATI) for 10 days at the DA ATI-RTC XII in Brgy San Felipe, Tantangan, South Cotabato.

"I was reluctant at first, because it was really out of my league. But I took the chal-

lenge, and to my surprise, I completed the course.” she added.

Amor proudly shared that she also passed the NC 2 Certification for Organic Agriculture. Most importantly, she met new friends and a community of COOs (Child of the Owners) from Northern Mindanao who motivated her. The motivation and knowledge gained also stirred in her a newfound love for farming.

Later she attended more trainings. She was trained in agro-entrepreneurship by TESDA, and ATI trained her on Training Management in Bulacan.

She immediately saw the potential of agro-entrepreneurship and agri-tourism. Something that their farm could capitalize given all the resources they have. She helped around in the farm by implementing all that she learned from her trainings.

“I was really grateful for all the opportunities ATI and other partners like TESDA, and the Local Government of Manolo Fortich

have given me.” Amor declared.

A Change of Heart

Amor’s newfound passion made her life a quick 360 degrees turn around. This paved way to more life satisfying chances through her involvement in their farm. Amor did not waste time and applied what she learned from her first training.

“Why would I work for others, when my family needs me to work with them?” she said.

In 2017, she became as the official farm accountant. Aside from doing administrative and accounting work, she was involved in the training and extension work of their farm with ATI and TESDA-Region 10. It was also in the same year that Alomah was accredited as a TESDA Farm School.

“We started to work as a team. I would personally facilitate the trainings and sometimes act as a Resource Person too,” she proudly said.



The importance of record keeping in the farm helps the Mahistrados keep track of their farm activities, schedules, sales, and expenses for a manageable monthly inventory.



1ST NATIONAL FARM FAMILY CONGRESS

The Role of Family Farming



Amor with parents Grace and Benjohn, attending the 1st National Farm Family Congress in Quezon City

Amor also shared about her experience with the students who had their immersion in their farm, and how fulfilling it was making others reach their full potential.

“The immersion conducted in our farm, was where I realized how fulfilling it was to help others,” she said further. “Somehow those students did not choose agriculture by accident. It was a passion deeply seeded somewhere in their hearts, and that seed needs to grow as their passion someday.

“It is my dream to help others through my own charity foundation. I think where I am now is the Lord’s answer,” she smiled. She said that she could clearly fulfill her dream of helping others and touching others’ lives through their farm.

Amor happily shared how she witnessed the lives and dreams she had changed for the better. It all started with a life’s twist which turned out to be a blessing.

Giving Farming a Try

Considered as a “window of opportunity”, Amor was encouraged by her parents to give farming a try.

The two years of farm engagement sustained her interest to engage in the day-to-day activities in their farm. Since attending various trainings outside the region, Amor’s farm involvement includes giving lectures and sharing farming technologies to others. It felt natural for her to re-echo and share what she have learned from the var-

ious trainings she have attended.

It was during this experience that Amor got inspired by the tales of empowered women (and men) after sharing her story.

“I started getting invitations to be a resource person since I shared my personal experience. It is inspiring to know that I am inspiring others because of my testimony of setbacks which I used as leverage to involve in farming.” Amor confessed.

She credited Semilya sa Kinabuhi, another Learning Site for Agriculture (LSA) partner of the ATI, for giving her the concept and idea of the farm-to-profit approach in farming.

“As to farm-to-profit, the approach prompts us to make use of the resources we have. It also gave me the realization that I don’t have to go abroad and work overseas to earn and make a living.” Amor added.

For a typical person, one’s perception of farming only involves hard toil and laborious tilling of land. For Amor, it goes way beyond that.

Sharing her love for Farming

“I am training Diego to do the farm tour”, she said. Diego is the youngest brother who is taking up Veterinary Medicine in Central Mindanao University (CMU).



Amor as a delegate in two separate organic youth forums in Taiwan.

Amor shared that all of them have been taking important farm work, from simple chores to personally dealing with walk-in visitors. Diego also works with other farm workers in some of the farm's production area, especially on livestock.

While middle child Dave, is the farm's in-house chef. He is the one in charge of preparing Alomah's famous vinaigrette. He is also involve in the delivery of online orders of fresh lettuce, lettuce seedling and herbs to nearby areas which fetches 40 thousand pesos to 50 thousand pesos per delivery, on separate location points in Cagayan de Oro City and Iligan City. Dave is a graduate in Bachelor of Science in Agribusiness. "Everyone in the family has a particular responsibility. My husband Vince works full time in the farm as a farm supervisor. We are really a team on this." she added.

As the eldest, Amor never failed to be a good model to her siblings. The sacrifices of choosing her family over her then dream has translated across beautifully.

"I chose to prioritize my family over my plans, and that is how I found true fulfillment." Amor proudly said.

Strong Family (Farm) Ties

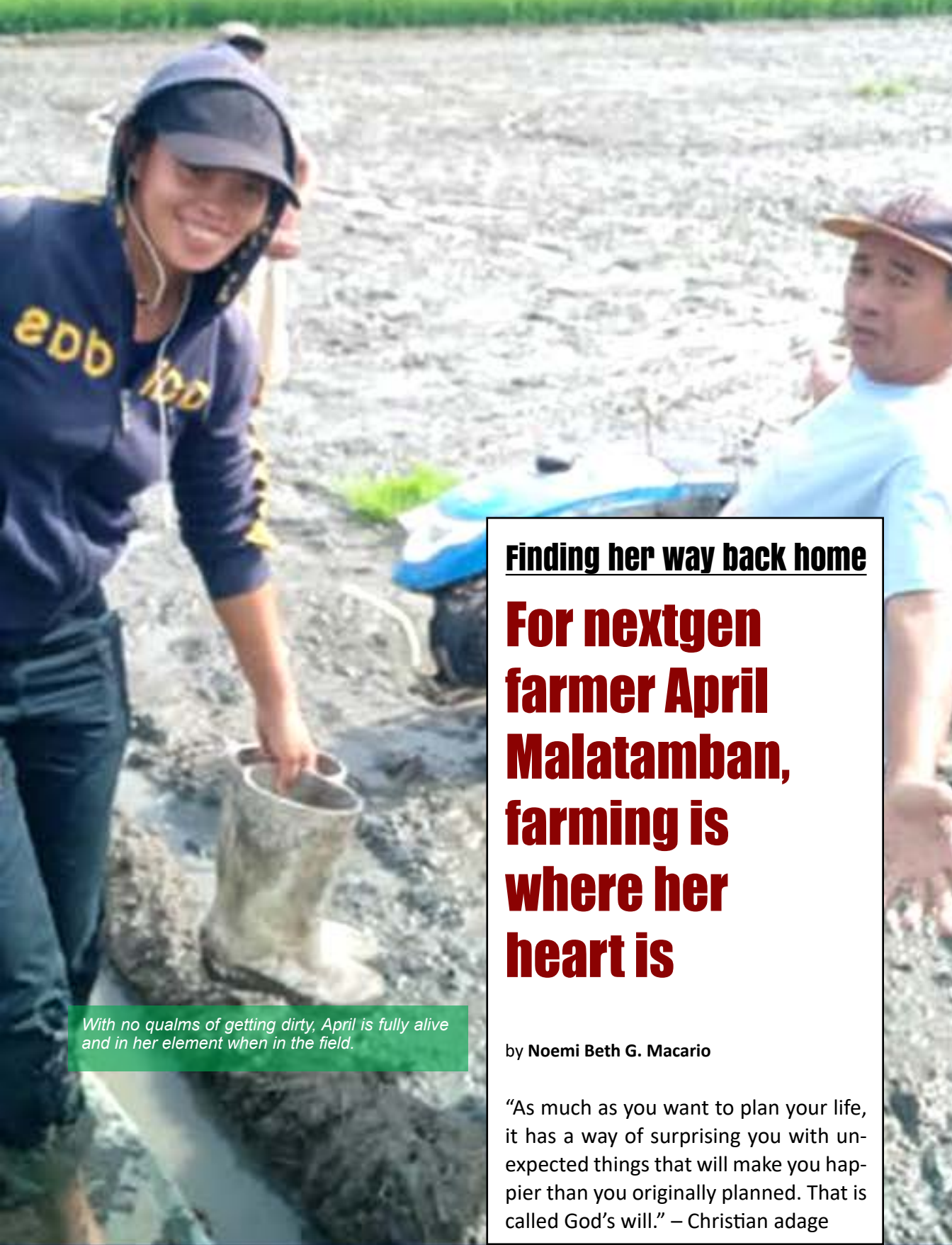
"The pandemic season has been our greatest challenge," Amor said. She said further that it has tested the resilience of the farm's recouping mechanism of untimely adversities.

With the help of its next generation, the younger Mahistrados have intensified their farm's social media presence. They are still preoccupied with online selling, and scheduled meet-up deliveries in Cagayan de Oro and Iligan City. Amor emphasized that complementation among every member of the family is one of the secrets of their success.

More than surviving the pandemic together, their greatest aim is to survive a lifetime together, grow, sustain, and expand what their parents have started at Alomah's.

"Agriculture is a diverse field, I believe that whatever your field or specialty is, you will always have something to contribute to the development of your farm." Amor concluded.





With no qualms of getting dirty, April is fully alive and in her element when in the field.

Finding her way back home

For nextgen farmer April Malatamban, farming is where her heart is

by **Noemi Beth G. Macario**

“As much as you want to plan your life, it has a way of surprising you with unexpected things that will make you happier than you originally planned. That is called God’s will.” – Christian adage



As a rice farmer, April is an awardee during the Regional Gawad Saka and Agricultural Achievers Awarding Ceremony in 2019.

Country Road

Like any typical youth growing up in the province, April Malatamban dreamed of going to the city. Who would want to choose a rural life compared to urban life? To her it was a no-brainer. Growing up in Bukidnon, life was simple but quite backward.

April grew up in Casisang, Malaybalay City with three sisters and two brothers. She studied in Malaybalay City from elementary until high school. Her father, Jesus or Tommy as he commonly called was a Police Major while her mother, Francis was a high school Math teacher.

She doesn't consider their family rich, but she grew up with her needs being provided. And though she thinks that their family was better-off than most in their community, she still dreamed of escaping the barrio life and live in the city.

The Detour

April dreamed of becoming an Electronics Engineer and working abroad. She studied BS Information Technology at Bukidnon

State University in Malaybalay City for two years; BS Electronics and Communications Engineering at Xavier University in Cagayan de Oro City for four years and finally transferred to Cebu Technological University and enrolled in BS Information Technology for two years. She was studying in College for 10 years already and has not graduated from any of the courses she took.

Ashamed that her parents are forever footing her studies, her wandering soul drove her to apply in Singapore for a job in electronics. She ended up working as a domestic helper. For the six years that she worked there, however, she proudly said that she was able to buy a one-hectare ricefield in her hometown. After Singapore, she went back to Cebu City to visit her friends. She then got a job and worked there. She enjoyed her work and the dynamism of working in a city.



When attending local trade fairs, April takes every opportunity to promote the health-benefits of consuming black rice and red rice.



April with fellow participants of the Digital Farmers Program 101.

The U-Turn

While working in Cebu, her parents were urging her to come back home. Her father has already retired and was active in attending trainings conducted by the Agricultural Training Institute, city and provincial agriculture offices, and the Department of Agriculture- Regional Field Office 10. Tommy became a known advocate of organic farming and a producer of organic black rice. He was one of the pioneers in their area who went into organic farming. His hard work was not in vain as he was awarded as Outstanding Organic Farmer of the Province and Most Outstanding Small Farmer during the Regional Organic Agriculture Achievers Award in 2016.

It was also around this time that April's father again requested her to come back

home to help him. After sometime, April relented. She felt that she is not getting anywhere in the city with her income, just enough to meet her active lifestyle.

Upon arrival from Cebu, April immediately joined agricultural trainings since she does not have any knowledge of farming, particularly organic farming. She learned and immediately introduced other sources of income such as vegetables, fisheries, livestock and processing of their farm produce. The farm and their products are slowly making a name. Her mother is already considering early retirement to help in the farm. However, before her retirement was finalized, April's father died. It was very painful for them and the responsibility of running their farm fell on April's shoulders. Her Mom then officially retired to help her.

The Super Highway

In 2018, April's mother won as the Outstanding Rice Farmer while April was awarded as Malaybalay City Agripreneur. They were again awarded as Most Outstanding Farm Family in 2020. It was no mean feat as April and her mom Francis were new to farming. The awards were bittersweet because they reaped the dreams and hardwork of their patriarch, Tommy.

April and her mother have many more dreams. They want to expand their farm and establish a Food Processing Center for a complete farm-to-plate offering. They would also like to expand their present products of rice polvoron, rice coffee and rice ice cream

to include rice vinegrette, rice wine, bottled atsara and tilapia sardines. The possibilities are endless especially as they are being exposed by ATI to other farms.

For April, the decision to go back home was a divine providence inspired decision. It provided time, albeit short, for her to spend with her father and learn the ropes running his beloved farm and imbibe his dreams. She was only given around two years to do the crash course, but passed with flying colors. The awards April and Francis received are a testament of the legacy that Tommy has bestowed.

April's search for happiness has led her way back home.



Sharing agri knowledge and best farming practices with visitors from New Zealand.



Mechanized farming is an advantage in today's farmers since it increases farm productivity.

**Destiny will
lead you
where your
heart belongs**

by **Cheaster Kimberly G. Magat**

No matter where you go time has its way to get you home.

Such instance is what happened to Windolyn Janice D. Navales, daughter of Sergio Navales, owner of SN Farmer, a certified learning site of ATI located at Simpak, Lala, Lanao del Norte.



When not driving a tractor, Windolyn approaches farming the traditional way by using conventional farming implements and a healthy carabao.

During her younger years, she grew up helping and observing her father in the field with an unknown desire to get involved in agriculture and no thoughts of following her father's footsteps.

She dreamed of being a lawyer, thus she took up AB-Political Science in college at MSU-IIT and later on pursued Bachelor of Laws in 2007 at the University of Southern Philippines.

While waiting for her license, together with her older brother, they furthered their career in Abu Dhabi in the Middle East and worked there as an executive secretary in a construction company with the thought of settling there for a while.

But then, time has its way to get her home. In 2018, she went home and took care of her sick mother. A year after that, she decided to assist her father in the farm and do the paper works to apply their farm into a learning site.

With the certification of their farm as a learning site, her interest in agriculture grew again. She noticed how ATI gave importance to farmers. She saw hope that in time just how ATI helped her father through trainings, she will be able to help other farmers as well.

Her love for agriculture grew as she became her father's partner in the farm and in handling trainings. At first she assisted her father in doing paperworks since during that time, aside from the trainings conducted from ATI, her father facilitated Farmer Field School (FFS) as well.

Her consideration of going back to Abu Dhabi flew out the window now that her love of agriculture is stronger than before. Sometime in August 2021, she got the opportunity to participate in the Training of Trainers on Inbred Rice conducted by ATI X.



During planting season, Windolyn helps out in transplanting seedlings with the rest of the farmers.



Windolyn with the participants of the FFS Production of High Quality Inbred Rice and SEED Certification and Farm Mechanization.

With this event, her father transferred the conduct of FFS trainings on her responsibility and was able to train more farmers. The fulfillment she felt seeing how a farmer's life changed and how she was able to help farmers through her training made her realize that after all, this is the life she wanted. Her farming knowledge in agriculture grew every day and continued learning from the train-

ings and IEC materials coming from ATI.

Before, it never crossed her mind to get involve in agriculture, the heart she was in farming was not that strong to pursue it. She may have already reached other destinations in the name of career, but time has its way to get her home which is her destiny---to have a farmer's heart.





Coming Full Circle:

AN OFW'S Journey Back Home

by Noemi Beth G. Macario

"If you love someone, set them free. If they come back, they are yours, if they don't, they never were." Her mom believes in this popular saying by Richard Bach, that is why she allowed her only girl, Queenie Notario to fly from her nest and seek for her fortune abroad.

Mom's Dream

Still, she called their farm Queensland, a testament of her love and hope that Queenie would one day find her way back home to manage their farm.

Queenie has two brothers who are already married and settled with their families far from home. Her mom, Ellen, is the original "plantita" who surrounded their

Queenie is a firm believer in the Tagalog saying, "Kung may itinanim, may aanihin". Here, she delights in the bounty of rambutan fruits which is in season.

Fresh from abroad, Queenie helps around in their farm by labelling the many planted herbs, fruit trees, and spices in their farm.



house with flowers growing up. Her mom is known to be very generous and would give her plants for free to other “plantitas” who express the desire to acquire a certain variety that they have. It was her mom’s joy and Queenie saw how her mom would buy again new plants to supplement her collection.

Her Dream

Like most young ladies, Queenie wanted to explore the world. Growing up as an only girl, she felt stifled and has longed for the freedom to do as she wish. She took up BS in Office Management Major in Airline Management. She believes that working in an airline would open opportunities for her to go to different places. However, af-

ter graduation, an opportunity to work in Taiwan opened. She grabbed it, believing that it would be a means to spread her wings, away from the protectiveness of her family. It is also an opportunity to earn lots of money. The fact that they are considered modern day heroes is just a bonus. She wants to feel that she is doing a service to her country.

Wake-up Call

She arrived in Taiwan with the optimism of the youth. True enough, she felt free and positive. The first few months were both a combination of happiness and sadness. For the very first time, the freedom she has was tempered by her loneliness. She missed her family. She missed having a

mom cook her favorite foods. She missed her mom's care and her brother's constant ribbing. She realized that abroad, she is on her own. If she wants to eat what she likes, she has to cook it. If she is feeling lazy, then she has to adjust to Taiwanese food. Oftentimes, she just eat noodles, the easiest food to prepare, though she knew that it is not the healthiest.

At the time she was in Taiwan, communication facilities are not as advanced as it is today. She cannot call as often since it is still very expensive. If she had her way,

her wages wouldn't be enough to cover her calls and food trips. So she just have to content herself with once a month calls.

After the bloom has brushed off, living so far from home has become a toll. She has toured Taiwan and there is nothing new to look forward to. The loneliness was the worst. To ease her feelings, she needs to work and work. Working abroad is not easy. She has to earn her keep. Basically, it is a no work, no pay scheme. And she needs to work because she has to pay rentals and she needs to eat.



Know more about herbs and spices at Queensland Herbs and Tourism Farm.

Still, it was not easy to give up and go home. Her pride won't allow her to accept defeat easily. She then transferred to Malaysia to seek greener pastures. Alas, the cycle began. The initial excitement eventually fades and she found out that it was not what she envisioned her future to be.

Discovering her Calling

In one of her vacation trips back home, Queenie's mom tried again convincing her to stay home permanently. She says there are lots of opportunities in developing their farm. Her mom has attended Trainings conducted by the Agricultural Training Institute (ATI) which opened her eyes to possibilities in farming. In fact, she said that she will file for retirement from the



Queenie in a posterity pose with her beloved family.

Department of Education to focus on the development of the farm. However, she made it clear to Queenie that she needs her as she can't do it all alone.

To make her mom happy, Queenie attended a Training on Herb Production and Processing. After which, she attended more trainings of ATI including Farm Business School. After attending a series of trainings, Queenie decided to give farming a try. She said that she was surprised by her decision since she believed that farming is hard work with less benefits. However, from the training exposures she gained, her perspective changed.

Queenie applied her work ethics abroad to their farm. She worked hard to learn her new craft. Eventually, she became a Resource Person on Herb Production and Processing and Farm Business School of ATI. She is always open to new ideas and learnings. She networked with other farmers and applied her learnings. When she gets a little suffocated, she goes on travel to various farms even outside the Region. She buys new varieties, soak up on new farming techniques and go home refreshed and full of ideas.

Eventually, their farm Queensland was turned into a family corporation and branched out to giving lectures to TES-DA scholars. Queensland became a Farm School. In this new endeavor, Queenie discovered her passion to teach. She is not afraid to train in far-flung and war-torn areas. Together with her mother and father, they train active rebels, former rebels, drug rehab residents, PWDs and many more. She finds fulfillment in serving the underserved in Lanao del Norte and Lanao Sur. Since 2020, she has trained more than a thousand.

Queenie has come full circle. She never dreamed that she would find contentment and even prosperity back home.

To learn more about Queensland Herbs and Tourism Farm, visit their Facebook account here: <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100080980290226>



As a resource person, Queenie shares her farming knowledge through hands-on demonstration to the training participants in their farm.

Harmonizing efforts in business and farm management

by Chelsea L. Asiñero

“In all aspects I was successful, but not in the farm” says a graduate of Conservatory of Music in the University of the Philippines Diliman

April shows her dominant CZ breeder hen

– owning a music school and a recording studio; a trader involved in mutual bonds and stock exchange; an investment adviser in a prestigious bank – excelling in Financial Management.

How can someone of such promising credentials say she’s unsuccessful in running a family business? Here is April Ocampos-Awaan’s humbling experiences as she took over Evexia Farm.

Evexia is an offshoot poultry of the Hoyohoy Organic Farm located at Barangay Hoyohoy, Tangub City, Misamis Occidental. The initial plan was to put up a poultry to serve as Evexia Farm was managed by Ms. April’s father, Loreto Leo S. Ocampos, the former governor of Misamis Occidental. She, on the other hand, was making her own name as an investment adviser in Metrobank for five years up to that point. In a series of unfortunate events, her fa-

ther suffered from a stroke forcing her to take over. Given the thriving career, it’s not surprising for her to be hesitant and surrender the responsibility to other family members. But through the confidence she had in her job experiences from music to banking, she eventually said yes in managing Evexia Farm.

Ms. April likes getting the work done right. And her venture in agripreneurship started with their family’s history. She narrated that her great grandmother, Lola Ines, was widowed at a very early age and was left to provide for 11 children. Even alone, she effectively raised the 11, by means of engaging in farming. Her Lola Ines’ story is passed on to generations after generations for the family to appreciate and acknowledge where they came from.

Given the family’s history and April’s track record, managing the farm wasn’t as



Keeping a coop of well-ventilated chickens to ensure a bounty of organic eggs.



smooth as she thought of it to be. At the very beginning of her management, she turned out to be frustrated that everything she worked on was subject to expenses without returns. Investing for livestock animals, operational materials and manpower for months on with mere costs and damages. “Daghan gasto sa sayop. Di na nato tanawun ang monetary ang pride nalang. Mas painful akong pride.” (The cost of making a mistake is expensive. Setting the monetary aspect aside, it was more painful to my pride.) It was such a feeling of dismay for April.

Her father then advised, “Farming is hands-on. You have to appreciate, you have to go there every day, you have to check the

farming site every day.” And that’s where her turning point began. April executed hands-on farming for their lettuce crops, as her father advised, and had earned big time in just 45 days or in one harvest. From then on, the drive in her progressively grew.

“Si papa ga patag sa yuta, he made sure that the foundation is good, strong. And now, I’m just laying down the bricks.”, she stated seriously, albeit metaphorically. Though making mistakes along the way, her father was consistently present to mentor her. As she continued her agripreneurship, stumbling yet getting back up, she emphasized prioritizing relationships when running a business.

Building external connections was highlighted by April. Though partnering with familiar faces, she sets stringent relationships with them. Negotiations on raw materials or equipment are to be followed exactly as the agreement. Errors or lapses should be dealt with professionally even with tight-knit friends and allies, to maintain a respected relationship.

Besides external connections, internal team play should be paid close attention to. “Management should be very corporate-like.” April said. True enough, professional relationships should be imposed in the workplace. Even if her laborers are stay-ins, she provides them with uniforms and gears. That is to show them that it’s not just another farm they have to tend to, but rather a professional place to work and grow. She also supports her staff by supporting their families. Besides their wage, employees and their beneficiaries enjoy benefits such as life insurance and hospitalization. It all comes down to mind-setting and the experience to be valued.

“Yes, money is there. But on top of it all, relationship.”, she realized that the most essential return of investment is not found on monetary conditions but the mutual respect between people.

“It was very painful and expensive mistakes, throughout three years.”, April shared. She was humbled by her trainings, her learnings from other farms and busi-



A new batch of chickens emerge from their respective shells.

nesses, and her hands-on experience in managing their own. She had benefited from pushing through despite stumbling down. Now, Evexia Farm's lechon manok is not only marketed in Misamis Occidental but also in Cebu.

Aside from their lechon manok, Evex-

ia Farm also supplies marinated dressed chickens to select supermarkets in Ozamiz City and its neighboring localities.

For more of Evexia Farm, check out their official Facebook page here: <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100064455472139>



Evexia Farm kids showing off their morning harvest of fertile eggs from one of their farm's breeder house.



Dannica shows a basketful of citrus fruits in their farm, DJE's Farm.



Learning how to operate a tractor, Dannica believes in mechanization to boost rice production in their locality.

Desire, not mere talent, defines one's path

A Journey to Turning One's Weakness into Opportunity

by Cheaster Kimberly G. Magat

Niño, Tubod, Lanao del Norte.

This was the manifestation of Dannica Jane Ellen Partoza, as she followed the steps of her mother in agriculture. She is the daughter of Helen Alguso, owner of DJE's Farm, a certified learning site operator of the Agricultural Training Institute-Regional Training Center in Region-X (ATI-RTC X) located at Sto.

As a daughter of a farmer, Dannica's interest in farming was piqued during a school project in her high school year, she was once tasked to grow plants but all ended up dying. In that event, she believes that she is unfortunate in the field and has no talent in it.

Thus, she took her National Career Assessment Examination (NCAE) with a desired career path of a public servant, research or chemical engineering.

As she got into college, she decided to pursue agriculture the second time around and took up Agribusiness Economics (AgriEcon) in UP Davao. They were handed individual project which involves marcotting a plant that will determine their overall grade. Unfortunately, the plant died, which intensified her desire to pursue agriculture.

In 2019, upon the demise of her father, all of the farm work were left under her mother. Dannica then decided to try pursuing agriculture the second time around, but this time, not on growing plants, but on assisting her mother on farm community engagements and helping farmers. This is where her desire towards agriculture was rekindled again. She attended a Training of Trainers for Rice conducted by ATI in Bukidnon. With the constant reminder of Efren C. Macario, one of the resource persons on the said training and currently Administrative Officer IV, this one training led her to participate in more ATI-initiated trainings.

As her passion for agriculture continued, a civic organization in Tubod, ONEDA, noticed her capability to lead and foresaw her future in agriculture. They designated her as president of 4H club, and later on became 4H vice president of the Province of Lanao del Norte. She also got the opportunity to participate in Kabataang Agribiz, a DA-lead event for youth and won financial assistance for her Agribiz project which involves vermitea, african night crawlers, and vermi compost. With this turn of events, she gradually helped her mother



Since rice is a staple commodity among Filipinos, Dannica helps in transplanting seedlings for a bountiful harvest.

train other farmers. She worked as a junior trainor on Farmer Field School (FFS) facilitated by her mother and later on was able to facilitate her own training incorporating her skills on statistics and business in agriculture.

Realizing in her heart and mind that agriculture is not only limited to growing plants, she initiated her first project for the youth which is the Online Gulayan Project during the height of the pandemic.

In this project, young people were encouraged to sell farmer's vegetables online or from their communal garden and in every purchase, a five peso share will be given to the member. The income generated from the project and solicitations were used to procure bond papers, USBs, and radio



Mentoring and guiding the 4-H Club Federation in Lanao del Norte.

which was distributed to schools in response to online teaching with the effort to help lessen the burden of the parents.

Today, at the age of 26, she already has 32 members including out of school youths in their barangay 4H club and a total of more than 200 members in the Municipality of Tubod. She have also established 4H Clubs to 17 barangays, encouraging them to register in DOLE, as a way to implement income generating projects. With her influence and leadership, four of her members

are pursuing agricultural courses in college and one member coming from her barangay qualified for the Kabataang Agribiz and got a handful of awards.

As she continues her journey in agriculture, she continues to implement a slew of income generating projects for the 4H club, starting from value-adding on banana, which is one of the major commodities in the municipality. She looks forward to the future together with honing the youth in agricultural entrepreneurial and livelihood



Among the farming technologies taught by Dannica to the youth is how to make carbonized rice hull.



Community organizing and extension efforts are some of the activities Dannica enjoys doing in their barangay.

skills. On the other hand, as she is working on incorporating her vermiculture project from her kabataang agribiz to their rice farming, she also intends to share with other farmers the aforementioned technology to address the increasing price of fertilizers.

Despite her discouragements and lack of talent to grow plants, fate has its way to involve her time and time again in agriculture. She may not have been blessed with a green thumb but she was able to foresee the opportunity to explore other fields of agriculture integrating her expertise as her strength. “Dili tuod kaayo ko maayo sa pagpananom, pero nag contribute ko sa agriculture sa lain nga pamaagi”, she expressed in the vernacular. “Agriculture is far from my dream job, but the passion and desire in my heart for agriculture is deeper. I may have encountered a lot of setbacks in this path, but nothing compares to the fulfillment I always felt in helping others, especially farmers and their children, that they may have the desire to follow their parent’s footsteps.”, she further said. Indeed, talent does not define your path, desire does.



As an Animal Science graduate, Jan is tasked as a technician at the City Veterinary Office of Cagayan de Oro City to take care of farm animals such as cows and carabaos by deworming them (or administering vitamins or vaccination).



This Rabbit raiser is his Father's Pride and Farming Legacy

by Shirley J. Delos Reyes

*"There is no failure except in no longer trying."
- Chris Bradford*

Has there been a moment in your life that you feel like giving up? When nothing goes the way you planned and all the efforts you have made goes wasted? You feel like your future is vague and futile. These ideas creep into your mind that consumes you like a poison in your faith,



With growing popularity and demand of rabbit meat, Jan's rabbits are gradually becoming popular among customers who add rabbit lechon to their fare and festive celebration.

but for this young farmer there is no failure, only wrong choices and frittered away opportunities.

Jan Rialester Pepito or “Jan-Jan” as his family calls him lives simply in the outskirts of Barangay Kinura, Kalilangan, Bukidnon which his family calls home. His mother was a public school teacher while his father owns and works in the farm. He also has younger brothers named Kevin and Kharl. Growing up, they were trained by their father to help in the farm. He and his younger siblings were given tasks every day and as the oldest, he is tasked to check and review their work. Life in the farm may be simple by the way he describes it, but those were one of the happiest moments he treasured. He is proud of his father as

he was able to afford to send them all to school, not until in his last semester in college. His father passed away due to a serious sickness. He was only 19 and became the man of the family.

First Inspiration

The death of his father served as the turning point of Jan's life. During his last semester of college, where he took up Bachelor of Science in Agriculture major in Animal Science, his mother pleaded with him to continue his father's hard work in farming. Instead of finding a career in the city after graduation, he followed his mother's request. With combined passion and inspiration, Jan took his father's place and started cultivating and planting their farm land

with cacao, coffee, rubber and corn. Unfortunately, his corn crops did not survive due to the extreme heat and climate change.

As the saying goes, nothing goes our way even if we put all our efforts in doing the things we love.

Another try

Despite the initial effort of corn production with no income, Jan replanted corn crops in his farm. In his mind, he considered corn as a highly valued crop which can be harvested in three to four months' time, and is always available in the market. His cacao, coffee and rubber crops are doing well which have gained profit and provided income to sustain his family's needs.

Again, for the second time around, his corn crops did not thrive due to rat invasion.

Third time's a charm

From failure to another failure in corn production, he still continued planting corn in his farm. Little did he know that this will also not prosper as the odds are still not in his favor in this commodity. During this time, he re-evaluated his future actions and started to think of other alternatives.

He tapped and asked guidance from experts, and that is when he came across the 4H club. One of his unforgettable experiences in joining the team and when he attended the Binhi ng Pag-asa Program of the Agricultural Training Institute last 2017. Aside from gaining various knowledge and skills in agriculture, he also met the girl that would be forever part of his life, his wife, Carelle Ann.

This opportunity served as an avenue for him to start all over again.

Endless Shot

For the meantime, Jan already let go of his desire in planting corn, instead he now focuses on marketing his cacao, coffee and rubber products. And then another hurdle happened, the Covid-19 pandemic hit in which it hampered his farm operations.

Instead of being discouraged, he came up with the idea of trying rabbit produc-

tion. During the pandemic, his income was at its peak due to the insistent demands for rabbit meat and its breeding. He also received an entry job position as technician at the City Veterinary Office in Cagayan de Oro City.

Before, he always thought that farming is only for food consumption, but if you talk to him now, he wants to encourage all farmers to be entrepreneurs. The lesson he has learned throughout his journey is that we should always think before we make a move especially in choosing the right commodity to plant. One must plan, study, try, evaluate and market one's products and all its aspects.



Jan was one of the awardees during the Regional Young Farmers Challenge – Summit & Regional Achiever's Awarding Ceremony as organized by the DA-RFO X at the Harbor Lights Hotel and Restaurant. Here, he is accompanied by his wife Carelle Ann.

As of the moment, he is juggling between his career and farm life. Hard as he describes it, exhaustion is nothing when you love what you do and do it with passion. Jan will never forget farming, as each effort is a living tribute of his father: growing up, it provided them food and it helped them to finance their studies.

Jan may have missed being successful in his third try, however, he is still looking forward to the fourth, fifth, sixth and so on attempts. He believes that a person has limitless opportunities in this lifetime.

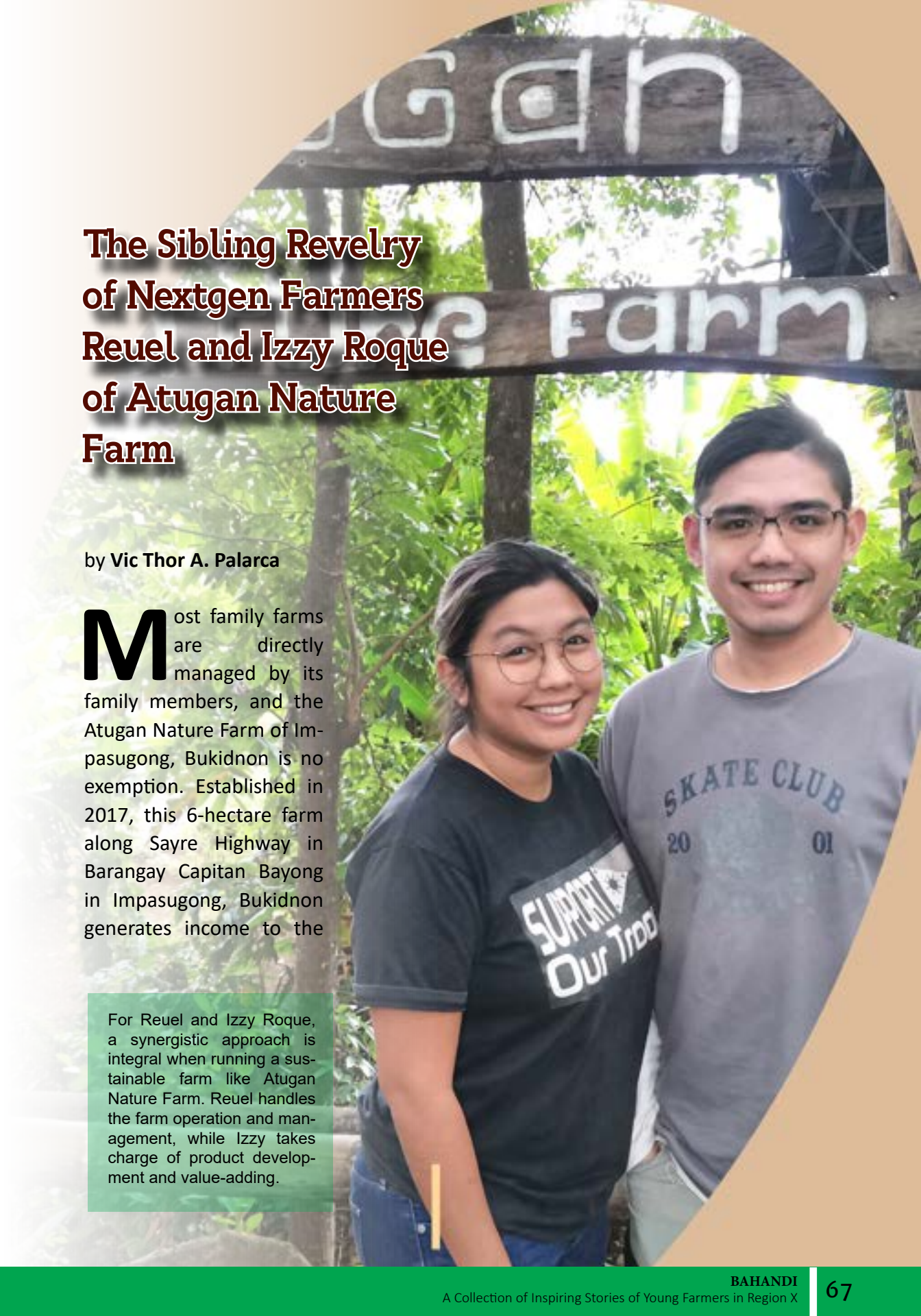
It is already instilled in his mind that as long as people eat, he will not stop farming.



When the rabbits are fully fed, Jan and wife Carelle Ann tends to their cacao crops.



In the Philippines, there is a growing market demand for rabbit as livestock meat or as a pet.



The Sibling Revelry of Nextgen Farmers Reuel and Izzy Roque of Atugan Nature Farm

by Vic Thor A. Palarca

Most family farms are directly managed by its family members, and the Atugan Nature Farm of Impasugong, Bukidnon is no exemption. Established in 2017, this 6-hectare farm along Sayre Highway in Barangay Capitan Bayong in Impasugong, Bukidnon generates income to the

For Reuel and Izzy Roque, a synergistic approach is integral when running a sustainable farm like Atugan Nature Farm. Reuel handles the farm operation and management, while Izzy takes charge of product development and value-adding.

Roque family and to their neighboring community.

Atugan Nature Farm is co-managed by siblings Reuel and Rezia Lyndee Maravilla Roque. Reuel takes charge of the farm operation (he dabbles with value-adding from time to time) while Izzy takes care of product development and value-adding.

In a day of farm life between the siblings, Izzy is constantly figuring out how to grow and develop their farm and she makes sure that the business has a path



For your coffee fix, a freshly brewed Robusta coffee is a must-try when visiting Atugan Nature Farm.



Atugan Nature Farm is home to Impasugong's premium, tasty, and fluffy binaki.

to grow in the next few years. Izzy plan things ahead, while Reuel executes their sensible plan.

The top earning commodities in their farm are corn and coffee. From planting corn, the family's farm workers make their bestseller binaki or corn rolls. Their coffee beans are sold in nifty pouches either as dry beans or as perfectly roasted Robusta coffee beans.

Embracing the rural and farming life

Prior to their farming venture and foray in agriculture, Reuel and Izzy spent their formative years in the US with their parents Rory and Dawn, and later lived in Cebu City for eight years to pursue their dreams and aspirations. As a film production major in the now defunct Big Foot Entertainment, Reuel preoccupied himself with show business and theater gigs, while Izzy initially

planned to become a doctor since she is a registered Medical Technologist.

"I resigned from my day job as a disc jockey and left Viva Entertainment (much to their disappointment) where I was a local talent juggling appearances on TV, variety shows, and hosting gigs. What could have been an opportunity to transfer permanently in Manila and to explore more gigs and opportunities as a contract artist, I decided to resign and pursue farming because of its promising potential", Reuel said.

The idea of growing one's own food and becoming a steward of the environment greatly appealed to Reuel that he did all the research he can find to expand his farming knowledge from online materials available, reading agri-related books, and streaming how-to guides in YouTube. It also helped that he got farming tips from his grandpa Roger and dad Rory.

“We really didn’t want anything to do with it at first. When we were growing up, we knew it was there but we had other dreams and best laid plans”, Izzy said as she recounted early memories in their farm.

The turning point for us, and the biggest factor was our relationship with our parents. They didn’t force us while we were going on our own way. We realized that it actually made more sense to be here. We really wanted to be able to help them and the farming community.

There were several times that in the process of growing things, post-production, and in selling our farm produce that we thought we didn’t do it properly, like there’s loss of income, loss of profit but still at the end of the day, we were still able to learn to use it properly or how to be creative with it. It helps to be on trial and error. I think as a farmer, it is essential to be patient and learn from it.

Part of the reason young people don’t want to go into farming is that you have to go through that process of failing and most people would rather choose not to fail, but failure is essential since you cannot appreciate the value of success if you haven’t failed”, Izzy said further.

Responsible farming with the environment in mind

On its five years as an organic farm, Atugan Nature Farm remains sustainable and eco-friendly because of its commendable farming method and practices.

“The hardest thing about natural farming is finding ways where we don’t have to use chemicals and one of the challenges we face is breaking the stigma against farmers and breaking the misconceptions that the young people have with farmers.

I want to see people slowly pulling away



Freshly harvested corns are the essential ingredients of Atugan Nature Farm’s popular binaki.



from chemical fertilizers and all sorts of chemical applications. With the advent of JADAM organic farming, permaculture and natural farming. I also want to see ecosystems returning to their natural state, because you can still farm and protect the environment at the same time, you just have to learn to use different methods in planting and soil preparation and more natural methods of it.”

As to their experience in planting corn, Reuel can keep up with their binaki production since he propagates their corn in a four-month gap interval through staggered planting. With staggered planting, he sows corn seeds every week or two over the course of four months. Staggering planting dates is practically extending the pacing of the harvest.

“In the future, I want to see more farmers using natural methods instead of using

chemicals. Using chemical is the easy way, but in the long term, it damages the soil and the environment. If you look at all the farms around us, most of them are using chemical sprays, so all of the wildlife that is supposed to be there congregates in our farm now. You can see Rufous-lored Kingfishers, Barn Owls, and Mindanao Kangaroo Shrews”, Reuel pointed out.

Agribusiness is a profitable business

The next generation Roque farmers not only believe that there is money in farming, they also consider the welfare of the farming community by keeping them employed, imparting them with farming knowledge, and engaging through a buy-back scheme.

As to their bestselling corn rolls or binaki, “we never had a full freezer. Every other

day, there's someone who will buy 10 kilos or 20 kilos in the farm. Oftentimes, when there is a batch of newly-steamed binaki available the next day, patrons or walk-in costumers will dine-in or buy the whole batch.

For the foodies out there who have not yet tried this corn-based delicacy, Atugan Nature Farm's binaki is also known as "bi-na-cake" for its vibrant corn yellow color, fluffy texture and delicately sweet taste. It is best served with a cup of hot coffee



while enjoying the outdoors against the cold Bukidnon breeze.

As of writing, Reuel plans to organize a coffee picking activity and share through a farm demo the bean-to-mug experience to its farm visitors.

Enticing the young people to engage in farming

Sure enough, Reuel's "star power" and ex-

posure in show business and the entertainment industry came in handy, and was his way to leverage agriculture and farming to his former colleagues and farmer-enthusiasts from all walks of life.

"I try to change the mindset of the young people and teenagers from the cities and let them know that farmers are not what the media portrays them to be like. When you watch teleseryes or watch Tagalog tv shows, the farmers are always wearing that long sleeve buttoned down worn shirt with

the wide hat and slippers. A lot of the farmers nowadays are not like that. The farmers that I know are doctors or soldiers or medical students who decided to go on full time farming.

The pressing issue of aging farmers and government interventions have also crossed their minds. In fact, Reuel

and Izzy are confident that today's young people have lots of ideas that can help and benefit the agriculture sector, and that today's millennials can innovate and are very much in touch with the internet when they are presented with big database and information to pull from.

"To the young farmers of today, I think they also have to have grit, so that they will not get easily discourage. If you don't have grit, you will get easily discouraged and give

up. Grit and guts. I have lost whole beds of crops just through trial and error. For some, it's enough to make them stop. Often times if you stop, you are just about to reach a new level", Izzy added.

"Farmers should be adaptive with the times. Remember what Bruce Lee once said? Be water my friend. I think farmers today should be like water, learn to bend, and learn to adapt to what's new. We have to learn to be open-minded. A close minded farmer will only stick to a certain method of farming, even though that method of farming is already obsolete. Farmers should modify or innovate the best farming methods that work for him.

"Also, we hope that the government will continue to promote natural methods of

farming. We have LGU visitors one time, they were amazed that we use leaf mold soil and not resort to the traditional ways of farming. We layer the soil or plots with leaves and left for a month or two to let microorganisms grow. The decomposed material is an excellent soil conditioner. We had a hard time explaining, especially to the older people practicing traditional farming that it is possible to farm the natural way.

"The most satisfying thing about farming is being able to see something through to the end, like seeing a crop reach its maturity stage. Seeing a single corn stock grow from little seedling to a full grown stock and to harvesting it. I love watching things grow. I love being given the chance to provide jobs here that's why we did farm tourism and we

are doing a lot of different and new projects, because we want to provide more jobs and we want to provide more livelihood, which is also one of our focuses in our Hinabol Project. Actually, we don't earn much from it, just enough to cover marketing and shipping cost for orders outside the region. As long we can help continue the weaving tradition of the Higaonon Tribe", Reuel concluded.

For more of Atugan Nature Farm, visit their official Facebook page here: <https://www.facebook.com/AtuganNatureFarm/>

Our Resellers in Cagayan de Oro



Uptown Reseller
Contact Details

09771121524

Camaman an Reseller
Contact Details

Wangyo's Pasalubong
Shop

[facebook.com/AtuganNatureFarm](https://www.facebook.com/AtuganNatureFarm)



Nextgen Farmer Glenn Soledad is a proud Rice Farmer Protégé

by Vic Thor Palarca

At 35, Glenn O. Soledad is no stranger to hard work and the farming life. As a product of the school of hard knocks, she have helped established their family farm in San Fernando, Bukidnon with high value crops and commodities like corn, cacao, adlai, banana, coconut, and other plants like oregano, mints, blue ternate, and citronella.

Although affected by the onslaught of the pandemic, Glenn was unfazed and did not waver in tending to her farm despite the tight resources, uncertain times,

Glenn stocking some of her farm products at Robinsons Mall in Valencia, Bukidnon.



ProPak Philippines 2020
Investment Forum
13 June 2019
BITEC, Bangkok



Attending the ProPak Investment Forum in Bangkok, Thailand.

and an aging father. It was during the pandemic that she strived more in developing her value-added products since she took advantage of the moments where she stayed in their farm longer. Her long-distance relationship with a British citizen have probably generated buzz among her neighbors as her ticket to immigrate and settle abroad, but Glenn stayed and chose to work on her thriving farm and agribusiness.

My interview with Glenn during this year's National



Glenn with her certificate in one of the ATI-conducted trainings she have attended and completed.

Rice Awareness Month (NRAM) and via Facebook messenger revealed this singular and sassy lady's determination to succeed in farming, and prove people from all walks of life that farming is a viable source of income:



YOUNG ENTREPRENEUR OF THE YEAR



Glenn as the Young Entrepreneur
of the Year as declared by Iba
College of Mindanao, Inc.

GLENN O. SOLEDAD

Can you share your early experiences when you got involved in farming?

It was sir Nicasio Engallado who was my biggest influence to join trainings about farming, organic farming, as well as cooking innovation. The great learning experience prompted me to shift course from Bachelor of Science in Information Technology to Bachelor of Science in Entrepreneurship way back in 2016. When I came back from Manila to visit Bukidnon, I paid a visit to Engallado's Farm and the farm was an eye opener for me that I decided to stay and help around in whatever way I can. I became their boarder/tenant but they did not let me pay rent. So in return, I help them with their house chores. It was because of the Engallado family that I understood the importance of natural farming, organic farming, and for caring the environment. I realized early on that I am proud to be a farmer, because farmers not only just feed their family, but also their community and the entire country.

When did you start processing your farm produce?

It was during my participation with the Kapatid Mentor Me Program that gave me the confidence more to focus and develop my products. Value-adding also helped me gain more income since some of my best-sellers include organic tableya, cornblend with blue ternate tea, suman moron with tableya, choco yema with tableya and the newly developed adlai as alternative to rice. My bestseller is the tableya. In a month's time, I can earn up to 10 thousand pesos or more including other favorite food items by our customers.

Do you have a physical store where you display your products?

I have a physical store named La Soledad Café which carries Soledad Food Products. I also have consigned items available at Robinson's Valencia and at the OTOP Hub Pasalubong Center which is also in Valencia.

What valuable life lessons have you learn from your chosen career?

I learned and realized the huge responsibility a farmer has for the country's robust economy and food security. Without farmers, many will suffer from starvation and would eventually die. I also learned to be open-minded and embrace new skills, learnings, and practical knowledge; to not limit myself about new farming techniques as long as it won't damage the nature or harm Mother Earth.

What is the hardest part of running a farm?

For me, personally, it is a constant battle between money and principle. There is certainly a big profit in traditional farming, but in the long run, it is damaging to our environment. Another challenge is to change the mindset of my farmer colleagues and

their hesitation to try new things. As an agripreneur, it is always a struggle to start a business, build a name, and penetrate the existing market with so many products out there and still earn a living from it despite fierce competition. I am tempted from time to time to call it quits and take a job elsewhere. I even question myself once if this is all worth it but eventually I found my calling and farming is where my heart is.

How do you keep afloat and find ways to stay in business?

With all of the struggle, I always ask God for guidance because He knows what's good for me and what my heart desires. Aside from my faith, I come up with practical and logical solutions like I have to innovate and come up with other initiatives to market and sell my products. I would focus on product quality to make my products stand out. Whenever I join trainings, I make time



The idea of returning customers inspire Glenn more to enhance the quality of her farm products.

to research and explore other possibilities to help me grow my business.

You mentioned about trainings, what particular learning or invaluable idea that stuck and helped you a lot?

The trainings of the Agricultural Training Institute (ATI) played a big role in my farming journey since they taught me to try new farming technologies. It greatly improved my perception about myself as a farmer after all the mind setting and mentoring. It certainly boosted my morale and encouraged me even further to learn more. It is because of ATI that I felt the concern and care of the government to our farmers. I felt the presence and intervention of the government to care for our farmers through ATI.

How do you change the mindset of today's younger generation about farming?

I give them honest advice. I tell them that agriculture is a viable career path and that there is money in farming through agribusiness. I always tell the younger generation that there are countless initiatives and programs of the government through offices like the Department of Agriculture (DA), ATI, DTI, TESDA, DOST, and others. All interventions they can use to further their knowledge about agriculture and agribusiness. It is just a matter of finding those learning opportunities and then later on start a career and forge ahead. For me, ang pagiging magsasaka, hindi dapat ikinakahiya, dapat proud tayo dahil tayo ang gumagawa ng pagkain para sa bansa. Glenn concluded in Tagalog.



Nextgen farmer Glenn Soleded as one of the participants who gave her testimony on rice farming during the National Rice Awareness Month (NRAM)

A close-up photograph of a woman with dark hair, smiling warmly. She is wearing a light green jacket. In front of her is a white airplane tray table with a meal consisting of a bowl of rice, a piece of meat, and some vegetables. The background is slightly blurred, showing the interior of an airplane cabin.

TEACHING BEYOND BORDERS:

From Maestra to Mag-uuma

by Giftfemae S. Catil

Ever notice how a stone thrown on the surface of the water bounces off, creating ripples before it sinks? That is how impactful a simple word or action may spread before you even realize. Like how a young farmer, Lonalyn Amper Sulatan or “Kenken” as people familiarly call her, expressed her gratitude to her benefactor, Greenminds Incorporated. From maestra to mag-uuma, how an elementary education graduate ended up teaching Organic Agriculture (OA) to the marginalized population.

Kenken is all smiles as she is about to enjoy her first airline meal.

Humble Beginnings

Kenken grew up in the small town of Sitio Gupaco Sinuda, in the municipality of the landlocked, Kitaotao, Bukidnon. At 29, she may seem to have always envisioned the path she has taken now as she animatedly converses with a confident smile on her face but she clarifies that her primary dream was to be an elementary school teacher.

A humble beginning which led her to her current love, agriculture. Enter GreenMinds Incorporated. One of Greenminds' advocacies is to support the less fortunate students earn their degrees through scholarships. Kenken is one of the lucky few given the chance to be sponsored from her

second semester in third year until graduation. She was an active volunteer in Greenminds Inc., which eventually landed her first job as an administrative aide in 2014, and eight years later, as a training officer of Umanika Eco-Cultural Farm, a Learning Site for Agriculture (LSA) of the Agricultural Training Institute-Regional Training Center X (ATI-RTC X) based in El Salvador City, Misamis Oriental.

How did she cope up with the big difference of the expectations of instructing a class full of kids to the reality of teaching organic agriculture to various communities? This is an area she never delved before. "Training. Unsa imo gitudlo sa uban, kabalo pud dapat ka," (You should be knowledgeable of what you teach to others.) she said. Her first ex-



A trip to Australia to see their famous Sydney Opera House is a dream come true for Kenken.



Culture and camaraderie among the farming community of Vanuatu.

posure was a 10-day training organized by the ATI-RTC X in Training Management. She was a blank sheet. She did not have prior knowledge on agriculture. Although her degree is remotely related to agriculture, she trained, gained new knowledge, and

did a great job during the training proper. Add to that, her teaching and mentoring skills came in handy in terms of sharing what she have learned. You can only teach the things you have understood and have tried so yourself.



As part of the value-chain process, Kenken teaches a farming community in Vanuatu about product costing and marketing.



One of her working trips abroad, Kenken mentors the farmer recipients of Fiji through extension, technology transfer and community organizing.

Teaching beyond Borders

The primary goal of Greenminds is to help the marginalized communities in Mindanao (in this case, the indigenous people or the Lumad) become self-reliant by teaching them skills especially in organic farming while promoting their own products like the processed nuts in partnership with government entities like the ATI-RTC X and other non-government organizations. They started with the Lumad in the region and now has reached across borders. Kenken, as one of its training officers has been one of the primary batches to be deployed overseas.

In a small country composed of little islands off the east coast of Australia, lies the Republic of Vanuatu. It is currently one of the recipients of the joint effort of Greenminds Incorporated, and their foreign NGO partner, Tear Fund New Zealand. They promote

sustainable farming and eco-friendlier option for the natives and the environment like the Sloping Agricultural Land Technology or SALT. As per definition, SALT 1 Technology Guide is a simple and low-cost technology of soil conservation and food crop production that allow farmers to generate sufficient income through the harvested crops all year round. It can also be easily replicated by farmers and so making it uncomplicated to teach. Today, the products made by the locals of Vanuatu are supplied to cruise ships and has helped them sustain their needs.

Kenken also participated in rendering her services to their Fiji Chapter, a little tropical archipelago in the South Pacific, and north of Auckland, New Zealand. They help the sexually-exploited women learn organic farming so they can stand up for themselves and generate their own income. Currently, their organization is help-

ing Solomon Islands, while Kenken stayed on the sidelines, this time as she assisted in their training preparation. They typically train communities for at least 10 days to determine their needs in order to keep helping them. They continue to contact and monitor these communities and deploy trainers almost annually (only halted during the pandemic) as they strive to achieve their advocacy of helping the ones in need. Starting from the Lumad and our local farmers up to our brothers and sisters beyond the borders.

Community Building

The road to community development is long and rigorous. It is time-consuming, costly and will never be smooth-sailing. But as long as people like Kenken continue to teach agriculture and reach out to these forgotten side of the population, that stone will create boundless ripples. Someday these communities that they have trained will also return the gratitude as they continue the legacy by sharing this earned knowledge of organic farming to

the vulnerable and the marginalized.

Kenken shares that whatever you set your mind into doing, take that challenge. Like how she overcame her feeling of uncertainties which led her to understand and love agriculture. In a sense, she did not deviate from her first love. From a teacher to a training officer, both teach knowledge to those who need it the most. A town is not made by one man. To build a community, you will need everyone's support. If you can be a little stone today, why not be it? Humanity does not distinguish color and agriculture is for all.

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This Fabulous Nextgen Farmer is a Good Role Model to Young People

by Angelli C. Doña and Vic Thor Palarca

“My plans for the organic movement is about leaving an impact in the community through organic agriculture. I’ll start with the youth in our village.”--- VJ F. Tagupa

Vic Jason Kristoffer F. Tagupa, or VJ, fondly recalled how he was directed to farming

SAFE Young Organic Farmers Founder, VJ Tagupa, advocates organic agriculture and is passionate in involving the youth in their community. Through their productivity and bountiful harvest, VJ have proven that young people can be an asset in terms of sustainable agriculture.

During VJ's early engagement with the SAFE Young Organic Farmers, he taught them how to plant, manage, and harvest their garden vegetables like the bounty of lettuce VJ is carrying. The batch of lettuce is the group's first time harvest from their own cultivated garden plots.



after five years of working in the corporate world. “It was in 2019 when I was fortunate enough to be part of the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM) Asia Organic International Course by Asian Local Governments for Organic Agriculture (ALGOA). There were 21 of us from Southeast Asia, and I was one out of the four representatives from the Philippines. It was an 11-day exposure to organic agriculture in South Korea, and the experience was life-changing. When I got back home, I realized that it is not every day that you get to experience being a scholar, and I told myself that I have to put my experience into action. Organic agriculture sparked something in me, why not affect others as well?”

True enough, VJ founded the SAFE Young Organic Farmers in their hometown Balingasag, Misamis Oriental. It was during the height of the pandemic when he saw the opportunity of building and nurturing young minds to love organic agriculture. He shares that if it was not because of the pandemic, he could not have stayed. “The pandemic brought us together here, and eventually if you love what you are doing, you will stay. I tried it, I liked it, and I stayed,” he said.

Influencing the community with Organic Agriculture

VJ's unexpected farm stay became a way of bringing the community together in an even fruitful cause. He says, “I think the



VJ's participation as one of the four representatives of the country for the ALGOA Organic Leadership Course in Goessan, South Korea in 2019 (top photo) and as official participant for the 5th ALGOA Summit in September 2019 in South Korea led to his full year commitment and exposure to their family farm.

most apparent effect, besides teaching them organic farming, is the bond and the relationship that we have built as neighbors, sharing the same cause, working for something to an organization, the technical skills, record-keeping, marketing, these are some of the few things that I have shared to them, and that I am proud of.” There were definitely times where the organization was put to the test by certain challenges, but VJ firmly says that in any failure, one should learn from it, take it as a lesson, and avoid repeating the same mistake.

In practicing organic agriculture and staying with the SAFE Young, he says, “If you know your personal self, everything in the universe conspires for you to reach it,

and for me, I’d like to say that I am slowly reaching it. I have to make sure that the SAFE Young works, I will take charge of this, and I will make this work.”

Founding the SAFE Young Organic Farmers

The Tagupa family donated three plots of land to be cultivated by the 15 youths from their community who were eager to learn organic farming.

“I came up with the SAFE Young Organic because I wanted to teach them, and let them see the value that the safest way of farming is doing it the organic way. And since our farm, SAFEGCC (Sustainable Agriculture Family-centered Entrepreneurial



The SAFE Young Organic Farmers vow to embrace the core principles of organic agriculture by upholding proper care, health, ecology, and fairness among consumers.



The SAFEGCC, Inc-Breadlife Family Farm practices the “baboyang walang amoy” in their piggery area. According to VJ, feeding the pigs with naturally sourced ingredients like azola, kangkong, salt, madre de agua, lime, and fresh grated coconuts greatly reduces the foul smell in their vicinity. Spraying liquidized IMO (Indigenous Micro Organism) also helps as well as flooring the pig pen with discarded corn cobs.

Group of Co-Creators) is a corporation, the SAFE Young is our social responsibility since SAFEGCC’s mission is to contribute in ending hunger with safe and nutritious food, and empowering family farms by making them climate-resilient.” VJ said.

SAFEGCC Inc., being an ATI-accredited Learning Site for Agriculture (LSA), fulfills their duty to share their farming technologies to the clients, which makes the SAFE Young very lucky to have both Mr. Victoria-no F. Tagupa, and Ms. Marivic F. Tagupa as their mentors in organic farming.

In a farm day’s work, VJ provides a free

training about organic agriculture, the basics of planting and plot management. The Tagupa family then provides the initial seeds or seedlings for planting as well. The three plots will be tended by the 15 core youths for them to manage from planting, to harvesting, up to equal sharing of profit.

“We teach them mainly about organic. We do not promote or encourage them to use chemicals in their plots. Since we make and have our own organic foliar, they can use it instead of resorting to using chemicals. They also have access to our composts and naturally-made fertilizers. Aside from that, we also impart knowledge on biodynamic

agriculture, and as much as possible, we encourage them to try the biodynamic calendar.

As to the whereabouts of the 15 youths since the pandemic, they are all still active today since they are planting for consumption and experience. We are aspiring to become the main lettuce producers here in Balingasag although making that happen is a challenge. I am currently eyeing on other international organizations which organizes contests or can provide and grant us funds for small and starting group like ours. If I can find one, I'm really leaning on coming up with lettuce production to concentrate on for the Safe Young.

The dynamics and increased popularity of Safe Young is making the farming community of Balingasag notice and aware of the group's existence. VJ shares that the big-

gest challenge is getting the attention and sustaining the interest of the members to get involved, but with his parents backing him up, it was more of a 'challenge accepted'. As VJ says, "You cannot expect them to be effective in what they do if they do not have the slightest idea about it, but if you also get their interest, you would have to make sure that they understand what they are doing, and why they are doing it."

Sexuality and preference not an issue

As a member of the LGBTQ+ community, VJ was candid that people around him, whether in his hometown and even abroad, has no issues with his lifestyle and personal preference.

"I never had any issue at all. When I had my 10 days Organic Foundation Course last



VJ in a photo op with the rest of the SAFE Young Organic Farmers along with Ms. Maria Joesie Lou Tumanda, Naturland Germany Country Officer for the Philippines. Naturland is an international organization for organic agriculture and is one of the largest international organic associations affiliated with farmers in 60 countries worldwide. Naturland is based in Grafelfing, Munich, Germany, which sponsored the SAFE Young Organic Farmers' first educational farm tour in Region 10.

2019 in South Korea with 20 other international students, it was not issue. It was not even brought up at all! I guess we were all just focused studying about organic farming. Even during the International Rice Conference in Bislig City in Surigao del Sur

Asia. It was not an issue at all.” VJ said.

With VJ’s presence and visibility in the farming community, SAFE Young is also making a safe place for young people who identifies as member of the LGBTQ+ and



As a young agripreneur, VJ gives free trainings from planting to selling the farm goods to the neighboring youths of Dumarait, Balingasag, Misamis Oriental as a means to spread organic farming in his community.

last 2018 where I worked as the Project Assistant during the event, I don’t think it mattered at all. I think that the international community are not particularly hard on the LGBT community.

who also happens to love farming and agriculture.

Connections they did not see coming

I even stayed in the same accommodation for a week with the President of IFOAM Asia and the Executive Director of IFOAM

“On a personal assessment, I must be doing something good, because I never thought we would receive funds from organizations

and companies.” VJ said when asked how he sees the outcome of the organization he has built.

Young as the organization is, they have already received numerous fundings from various organizations, and from people who believes in their cause. The organization is thankful to CITIBank, the former company where VJ used to work, and Naturland Germany for paving a way for the SAFE Young members to have a farm educational tour at Alomah’s Place and Nature Farm in Manolo Fortich Bukidnon. Alomah’s Place and Nature Farm was instrumental in teaching VJ how to plant lettuce and the implementation of other agri-technologies.

VJ also takes pride on being the interim president of the Youth in Agriculture in the Philippines, where the SAFE Young was also recognized and featured interna-

tionally. The organization is indeed overwhelmed with the positive feedback they receive from people telling them that they are an inspiration to them, and hopes they continue with their movement.

On a side note, VJ also thinks that being a graduate of Development Communication has also helped him a lot in expressing their vision of growing safe and nutritious food. “I think being a DevCom graduate has helped me a lot, especially when you have a solid foundation of what communication is and its dynamics, and of course, my skills in communicating definitely led me to the right people, people who believed in SAFE Young.”

This article was also published in Manila Bulletin and Agriculture Magazine online and in their October 2022 issue.

VJ with proud parents Victoriano F. Tagupa and Marivic F. Tagupa, both as his mentors in organic farming and the ways of sustainable agriculture with long term goals like environmental health, profitability, as well as social and economic equity.





Aside from making chocolates, EMV Processed Food Products also offer healthy organic food items such as fruit preserves, mangosteen and turmeric powders, and pili nuts.

Millennial left corporate job to make gourmet chocolates for a living



For that velvety smooth chocolate experience, Med refines her cocoa paste with a melanger.

by Vic Thor A. Palarca

When Medily S. Villamayor decided to take a break from corporate life, little did she know that she would be sticking around in her hometown Malaybalay for a while.

Because part of her daily grind involves assisting her father, retired colonel turned farmer Edgardo M. Villamayor, with processing their farm's produce like mangosteen and turmeric into consumable powders, the thought of processing cacao beans and turning them into sweet treats crossed her mind.

The experience in processing mangosteen prompted Med to self-study chocolate making by watching how-to guides on YouTube. She also did research work through the internet, after realizing that there is a growing interest and market demand in

sourced cocoa and organic chocolates using single-origin cacao as the main ingredient.

In her one month respite at EMV Diversified Farm, the family's certified Learning Site for Agriculture (LSA), the UP-Mindanao B.S. Applied Math graduate started making chocolates in 2018.

The early bars of chocolate were far from perfect, but it marked a start in her calling and career as a chocolatier. "Most of us got the idea how tableya is processed, I was quite challenged on how to come up with chocolates. It's pretty much the same process, from the drying of the cacao seeds to grinding, but how is chocolate made?" Med says.

In a scheduled interview, Med shares her thoughts below regarding her sweet source of income.

What inspired you to venture in making chocolates?

“Ganahan ko ug chocolates. Wala man siguro tao nga walay hilig sa chocolate. Specially kadtong sa gamay pa ta. Ingon pa nila, 9 out of 10 ganahan ug chocolates, but one of them is probably not telling the truth. (I like chocolates. I think no one dislikes chocolate, especially when we were younger. As they say, 9 out of 10 likes chocolates, but one of them is probably not telling the truth.)

What did you find the most challenging about starting your own business?

The challenge was getting the right equipment since when I started, I was using the generic galingan (grinder) and then I saw

on YouTube this thing called melanger, which gives off very fine and creamy cocoa paste. A chocolate melanger is a cylindrical device used to grind cacao beans and nibs to make cocoa paste (also known as chocolate liquor). This is an ideal kitchen tool for chocolatiers who want to make their chocolates super fine and extra smooth.

So I started making chocolates, but it was coarse from the get-go. It tasted “chocolatey” already but the look and mouthfeel is just like tableya with sweeteners on it. I personally wanted to have that chocolate experience the way we enjoy a store-bought chocolate bar.

I found out later on, that there is a difference in terms of consistency when availing the grinders in the local market from that of a melanger. I experimented on the

The chocolate maker shows off her creation. Med Villamayor is on a constant lookout to maintain the quality of her chocolate bars.





After going through a process called tempering and molding, EMV's chocolate bars are then ready for packaging.



To date, EMV Processed Food Products have three chocolate variants: the 70% Dark Chocolate with no milk content, their bestseller 45% Milk Chocolate and the 55% Dark Milk Chocolate which comes in sleek and sophisticated packaging. The 14 grams is sold at 45 pesos each, while the 50 grams are sold at 100 pesos each.

percentage of sugar, cocoa concentration, the taste, and until such time that I got the right mixture and blend per bar.

At the moment, as the manager of EMV-Processed Food Products, I am the sole in-charge of making our chocolates. I have a helper who does the washing of the

utensils and kitchen tools.

What goes into each bar of your popular gourmet chocolates?

In a nutshell, my process of making my chocolate bars start with the same process

of producing tableya, but I just make it finer with higher standards. Then I add milk and sugar to make my bars creamier.

When making chocolates, I refine everything with a melanger. Then I add sugar, milk, and cocoa butter. Then it goes through the process of tempering and into the mold. I use a polycarbonate mold, but an ice cube tray or a thin sheet of silicon tray will do also.

What makes chocolate really good and fine to eat is through tempering with the use of a spatula and a scraper. Tempering is also known as slab or table method. A chocolate does not melt easily when it goes through the process of tempering. I noticed that the outcome is good when I temper my chocolates, and most of the bars I sent to trade exhibits are the ones easily sold out.

For now, I have three variants: 70% Dark Chocolates (percentage refers to the cacao content, no milk) 45% Milk Chocolate (the bestseller) and 55% Dark Milk Chocolate. They have a one year shelf life if processed right. The 14 grams are sold at 45 pesos each, while the 50 grams are sold at 100 pesos each.



What are the challenges and your marketing strategy to reach out to your customers?

On its initial outing, the marketing of the chocolate bars were done through word-of-mouth. Most of my mom's officemates (Bukidnon State University college dean Mercidita S. Villamayor) in the academe or school visitors drop by at the farm and we let them have a free taste or offer snack during meetings and



Another challenge is to brace myself from questions of potential customers like “nganong mahal imung chocolates?” (why are your chocolates expensive?) It’s a challenge to alter their mindset that what they pay for are premium chocolates worth their money. Good thing, the market demand for organic is growing since consumers are gradually getting aware of the health-risk of consuming alternatives compared to the real thing.

Can you share more about the real and fake chocolates you mentioned earlier?



I have learned from experts that there is real chocolate and fake chocolate. The real chocolates come from the cacao plant, from the ground cacao beans added with sugar and milk plus cocoa butter. You can tell by its aroma, texture, the snap, and the chocolateness that simply spreads into your mouth. The fake chocolate is composed of coconut oil and cocoa powder.

There is also a debate about white chocolates. Real white chocolate consists of cocoa butter plus sugar, plus milk. The cocoa powder was removed, and only cocoa butter was used. There is still a

event giveaways. Other times, balikbayan friends and OFW colleagues would order my chocolate bars as pasalubongs. I still make bad bars due to the wrong temperature and timing, but I’m getting the hang of it. As the cliché goes, practice makes perfect.

cocoa component though. You can call it chocolate when there is a cacao component.

In five years time, what can your customers expect from EMV Processed Food Products?

More food items and products. There is a plan to develop cacao wines, since I have already tried making banana wines on our farm. I saved the juice and within 6 to 12 hours it must be transferred to the fermentation bottles so that you can make them into wines. Unfortunately, for now, the harvested cacao pods in the farm aren't enough to generate cacao juice to make wine. We can always buy or outsource wet beans though.

What advice do you give to those who want to turn their passion into business?

Do what you love doing. Give it a try first. Try farming. Try business. If it works for you, go for it. Go for that thing that sparks your interest. In my case, I did not intend to engage in business since I was eyeing to

secure a corporate job. I started as Operations Research Analyst, then eventually, I did a lateral transfer to Systems Architect in a life insurance company. Then I resigned and figured out what to do next, something worthwhile my time and effort and something I enjoy doing.

Also, try to gather more information and skills. I was lucky and thankful for the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) for their training on chocolate making. I enjoyed and learned so much since it was demonstrated through a hands-on process.

Aside from your own creations, what are your favorite chocolate products?

My chocolate of choice is either Meiji, Auro, or Theo and Filo. I lean towards the less sweet stuff, with the milk not overpowering the chocolate. Dark chocolates and sometimes milk chocolates, but not so sweet.

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Daisy Joy R. Sales - *Administrative Support Staff*
Eugelyn C. Cailing - *PAFES Technical Support Staff*
Frances Mari G. Roa - *PAFES Technical Support Staff*



If you want to visit the farms or ATI Learning Sites (LS) featured in this book, you may contact our office at:

Agricultural Training Institute Regional Training Center X

Poblacion, El Salvador City, Misamis Oriental



rtc10.dcc@ati.da.gov.ph



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Cassandra Camille R. Sabasaje - *Technical Support Staff*
Angelli C. Doña - *Technical Support Staff*
Jan-Ariss Jadraque - *Technical Support Staff*



PROCESS MAP

How to be a LEARNING SITE FOR AGRICULTURE



1 APPLICANT SUBMITS LETTER OF INTENT TO ATI WITH ENDORSEMENT FROM THE MUNICIPAL AGRICULTURIST/ PROVINCIAL AGRICULTURIST / CITY AGRICULTURIST



1

ADDRESS THE LETTER TO:
MARIA LYDIA A. ECHAVEZ
TCS UOIC-CENTER
DIRECTOR



2



ORIENTATION OF LSA APPLICANT



SUBMISSION OF FARM PROFILE, PHOTOCOPY OF LAND OWNERSHIP, MOU FOR THE USE OF LAND FOR FIVE YEARS, CERTIFICATE OF TRAININGS ATTENDED, MOU/ CERTIFICATION OF DA SUPPORT

5



4



3

IF QUALIFIED, FARM FIELD VALIDATION / OCULAR INSPECTION WILL BE CONDUCTED BY A TECHNICAL WORKING GROUP FROM ATI

TABLE EVALUATION OF DOCUMENTS SUBMITTED TO THE TECHNICAL WORKING GROUP. APPLICANT WILL BE INFORMED OF THE RESULT.



FARM PROFILE FORM WILL BE PROVIDED BY ATI



6



SUBMISSION OF THE FIVE YEAR FARM DEVELOPMENT PLAN

7



SIGNING OF LEARNING SITE ACCEPTANCE FORM



ATI-RTC TO ENDORSE LS APPLICATION TO ATI-CENTRAL OFFICE FOR LS ACCREDITATION

9



8



SIGNING OF MEMORANDUM OF AGREEMENT(MOA)FOR ESTABLISHMENT BETWEEN ATI AND LS APPLICANT



10



ISSUANCE OF LSA CERTIFICATE AND SIGNAGE