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ATING KAUGNAY

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PURPOSE-DRIVEN *Farming*

Before the Covid-19 pandemic struck, Jhocel decided to leave his work in Manila as a machine operator and go back home in Albay to help his elderly parents. He invested his savings on farming. He started with seven hogs. He retained two which served as breeders.

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ATI Bicol

Dati nagtatrabaho ako sa Manila, halos patas lang ang sinasahod. Sa sampong ginawang tama, nagkamali ka lang ng isa, nabura lahat yun.

(I used to work in Manila. If you did one thing wrong, the ten things you did right would be overlooked.)



His father is a farmer but age was slowing him down. His mother, a housewife, takes care of their small sari-sari store. "Naisipan kong bumalik dito, sabi ko mag-aalaga na lang ako ng baboy, isda at manok. Para din maiahon ko sa hirap sina mama. Dalawa na lang kaming walang pamilya. (I thought it would be best to return here, and make my living growing swine, fish and chickens. There are only two of us who do not have our own family yet.)"

Less Travelled

Jhocel's farm is literally on a road less travelled. From the provincial road, one has to travel about half a kilometer of paved barangay road with an amazing view of Mount Mayon. The tree-lined road progressed into a long unpaved dirt road lined with houses.

Further on, one had to go on foot or ride a motorbike along an unpaved footpath to reach a small farm located near a creek running downstream from the slopes of Mayon. Jhocel rode a motorbike to his farm.

He bought and sold five motor-

bikes since he started farming. He maintained one for his own use. "Dahil sa pag-aalaga ng baboy, nakabili ako ng anim na motor. Nabenta ko ang motor nang nagka-ASF. (From swine raising, I was able to buy six motorbikes. I sold the bikes when the African Swine Fever struck.)"

On the creek near his pigpen, he raised tilapia. Jhocel's enterprise was growing, but unexpectedly suffered losses. The first was having his herd of pigs – 10 sows and 22 fatteners – wiped down by ASF in 2020.

His second loss was the lack of government compensation. It turned out he should have informed the City Agriculture Office and waited for an inspection team before burying the carcasses.

The experience would have defeated anyone, but Jhocel did not dwell on obstacles. "Nagpahinga ako ng isang taon, disinfect muna lahat ng kulungan. Buti ngayon naka-recover na ulit. (I rested for one year, disinfected the pigpens. Thankfully, now we are recovering.)"

Free-Range Income

The Binhi ng Pag-asa Progam (BPP) gave him an alternative livelihood just in the nick of time. In 2021, he quickly refocused on raising his starter kit of Dekalb chickens consisting of 13 hens and two roosters. He lost only three of the hens within a year. "Nasipon, nagrukrok nang bagong lipat. Nagbakal akong bulong at electrolytes. Pagkatapos noon, hindi na sila nagkasakit. (They caught a cold, they became lethargic. I gave them medicines and electrolytes. After that, they did not get sick.)"

He sold one-month old Dekalb hatchlings at Php 1,500 per pair. At her mother's sari-sari store, neighbors bought the brown-colored eggs Php 10 each. "Dahil sa pag-aalaga ng free-range chicken, maraming nahikayat na mag-FRC. May bumibili ng pares, magpaparami rin daw sila, mga kaibigan ko po. (As I ventured into FRC production, many people got motivated to raise FRC. Some would buy pairs and said they would be raising these also.)"

Living with his two elderly parents and two other siblings,

it mattered to Jhocel that their household did not lack FRC eggs to eat.

A true 4-H'er, Jhocel proved to have a knack for productive chicken farming. He computed his gross income to be approximately Php 25,000 from 12 trays of eggs sold at Php 10 per egg, and 15 pairs of chicks sold at Php 1,500 per pair.

Ripples of Change

With his example, Jhocel's twin brother, other relatives and some neighbors also turned to farming.

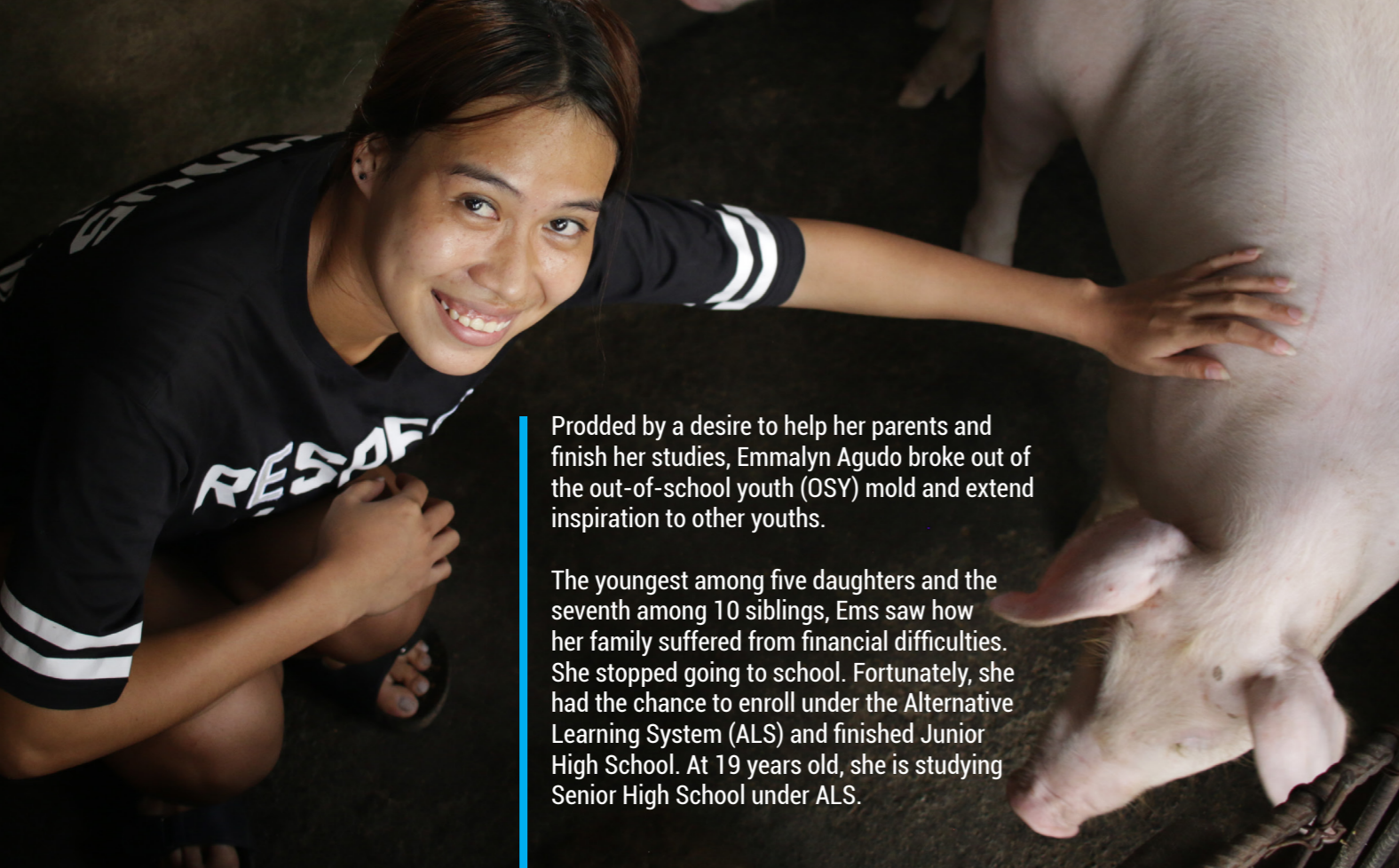
Jhocel also wanted to relocate his FRC project into a more spacious area. His plans no longer focused on him, but on others. "Gusto kong maparami ang produce na itlog, maparami ang chicken. Gusto ko marami pang mahikayat sa pag-aalaga ng hayop. Gusto ko silang mahikayat para dagdag sa agrikultura. Karamihan kasi sa kabataan, nawawala ang hilig sa agrikultura. (I want to increase the eggs and chickens that I produce. I want more people to go into poultry and livestock production. I want to encourage them so as to enrich agriculture. Most youths

now have little interest in agriculture.)"

Certainly, his views on farming have changed. "Simula nang sumali ako sa 4-H, sa Binhi, mas na-engage ako sa agrikultura. Dati po kasi, akala ko, once nasa agriculture ka, mahirap ka. Nagbago yun. Malaki rin pala ang kita. (When I joined the 4-H and Binhi, my involvement in agriculture deepened. Previously, I thought when one is in agriculture, one is poor. That view has changed. It turned out, there is a lot of income.)"



From Out-of-School Youth to ROLE MODEL



Prodded by a desire to help her parents and finish her studies, Emmalyn Agudo broke out of the out-of-school youth (OSY) mold and extend inspiration to other youths.

The youngest among five daughters and the seventh among 10 siblings, Ems saw how her family suffered from financial difficulties. She stopped going to school. Fortunately, she had the chance to enroll under the Alternative Learning System (ALS) and finished Junior High School. At 19 years old, she is studying Senior High School under ALS.

Mag-aaral po ako, magtatapos at tutulong po sa pamilya ko. Tutulungan ko rin po ang mga kapatid ko, kasi po yung mga ibako pong kapatid, maa-ga pong nag-asawa. Pagka-graduate ng college, nag-asawa na po agad, kaya na-disappoint po si papa.

(I will complete my studies and help my family. I will help my younger siblings, because my older siblings got married early. After graduating in college, they got married, which disappointed my father.)



Training for Young Agripreneurs

In 2020, she attended the Binhi ng Pag-asa Program (BPP) training in 2020 and received two piglets and one sack of feeds worth Php 13,500. While the training was still ongoing, she asked her parents to help her prepare the pigpen.

As the African Swine Fever (ASF) epidemic was still raging across the region, it took a while for the starter kit to be delivered, but Ems patiently waited. "Hinintay po namin, thankful po kami dahil naging beneficiary po ako ng BPP (We waited, we are thankful that I became a BPP beneficiary," she said.

After three months, Ems earned Php 26,000 from the sale from the first cycle of her project. "Para sa akin, na-maintain ko ang project. Nagtuloy-tuloy po ito dahil nahikayat akong mag-alaga ng baboy (For me, the project was sustained because I was motivated to do swine production)," she shared.

The second-cycle piglets cost Php 3,800 each. After three months, Ems earned a gross income of only Php 14,000 because live weight cost Php140 per kilo.

Despite the turnout, Ems maintains a positive outlook. Her project is now on its third cycle. Ems recounted, "Expected ko na po yun kasi sabi-sabi

na sa amin, ang baba daw talaga per kilo. Pero hindi naman po ako nawalan ng ganang mag-alaga dahil dun. Hindi naman talaga kami luging-lugi, may kita pa rin po kahit papano. Kasi part ng negosyo ang malugi ka, hindi palaging malaki ang kita mo. Kaya po pinagpatuloy ko pa rin po ang pag-aalaga ng baboy. (I was expecting it because people were saying that the price of live weight was really low. But I was not discouraged from doing the project. I was not completely at a loss, I still earned some income. Doing business could involve some loss, the income is not always high. So I continued the swine raising project.)

"Katulong ko ang family ko, kumbaga family support. Nagtutulungan kami sa pag-aalaga, pagbili ng pagkain nito. Nasosolusyunan naman po ang mga problema. (My family's support helps me. We help each other in caring for the pigs and buying their feeds. We find solutions to problems.)"

Her father, a farmer, would sell cash crops. The income helped Ems buy feeds for the pigs. "Na-encounter ko dating problema ay feeds, kasi sobrang mahal, isa lang po akong estudyante. Ang pambili namin ng feeds ay galing sa mga tanim ni papa, binibenta po namin. Nasolusyunan din namin with family support po. Ang pagkain, hinahalan ng mga dahon-dahon, niluluto namin (The feeds cost a lot, and I am just a student. The money for buying feeds would come from the sale of my father's crops. With family support, there are solutions to problems. We cooked leaves as supplemental feeds.)," she pointed out.

Learning By Doing

Hog raising helped Ems and her family financially. From its income, she was able to give money to her parents and siblings, and

support her own needs. She related, "I'm super happy kasi malaking tulong po talaga ang binigay ng ATI at ng Office of Senator Grace Poe. Natuwa rin po ang papa kong nalaman nya. Sobrang supportive rin po sya saakin, sa pag-aalaga ng baboy namin. (The help given by ATI and OSGP was a big help. My father was also happy when he learned about it. He is really supportive of me, in taking care of the pigs.)"

For her third cycle, the young entrepreneur received help from the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI). She attended the DTI Design Thinking for Entrepreneurship Boot Camp. Her project proposal received six sacks of feeds worth Php 10,000.

"May mga natutunan na po ako. Sa pagpapakain, pag medyo nasosobrahan, nag-i-LBM sila. Pero sa sumunod na cycle, wala na po, nami-maintain ko na ang health nila, (I have learned a lot. When too much feeds are given, they have diarrhea. But in the next cycle, this does not happen anymore, I could maintain their good health," she shared.

She planned to go into swine breeding to level up her project. She has learned a lot from her starter livelihood project.

Learning from previous experiences, she preferred to sell by live weight. "Dati may baboy kaming native, kinatay namin at binenta. Maraming nag-order pero hindi nagbayad. Dun kami nalugi. Pag sinisingil namin nagagalit. (We used to grow a native pig which we slaughtered and sold. Many people placed their order but did not pay for it. We suffered financial loss for that. They got angry when we asked for their payment.)"

Serving Others

After the BPP training, Ems was elected as Secretary General of the Youth Network Executive Council (YNEC). YNEC conducted various seminars to encourage and motivate OSYs through pathways orientation, Ems explained. She herself served as Resource Person on several topics such as ALS.

She observed, "Ang mga dating OSYs ay nakakapag-aral na po, hindi na sila sobrang mahiyain, may confidence na po sila para magsalita o mag-explain. Masaya po para sa amin na nakakatulong po kami sa aming kapwa. (Previous OSYs could now attend school, they have gained confidence to talk and explain. We are happy that we could help others.)"

Ems' family could proudly say that this young woman is definitely growing in stature – as an agri-entrepreneur, as a leader, and as a person.





Replacement Trainee

For Cristian, a Bachelor of Agricultural Technology (BAT) student at the Central Bicol State University of Agriculture, agriculture is his first choice. He wanted to take up Agricultural Engineering, but opted to study BAT knowing he could not nail down calculus and chemistry concepts in online classes.

His Binhi ng Pag-asa Training starter kit consisted of 18 ready-to-lay Dekalb Brown hens and two roosters. The following week, the hens started laying eggs.

Cristian did not rely on commercial feeds. He mixed with shredded coconut meat, leftover steamed rice, madre de agua leaves, mulberry leaves, and banana trunk. This way, one sack of feeds lasted for a month instead of two weeks. Each sack of feeds cost Php 1,650. He planted madre de agua and mulberry around his home.

A few months after the chickens started laying eggs, Cristian purchased an automatic incubator from a local manufacturer costing about Php 6,500 with 120-egg capacity.

Overcoming Challenges

Not long into his agri-enterprise, Cristian's Dekalb brown came down with infectious coryza. About 30 second-generation Dekalb Brown chicks survived the disease, along with 16 first-generation hens and two roosters. These were vaccinated against New Castle Disease, but not for infectious coryza.

Infectious coryza affects the respiratory system, causing eye and nose inflammation and mucus in chickens. Fortunately, the Binhi training tackled proper health management. Attending a webinar conducted by ATI about naturally grown free-range chicken, Cristian learned how to prepare the mixture which he sprayed on the eyes of chickens every four hours – calamsansi extract, brine solution, and ground cayenne pepper. He also mixed Premoxil in the drinking water. After a week, his brood visibly improved.

Cristian produced about 150 Dekalb chicken eggs and sold almost 50 ungendered hatchlings at Php 75-85 per chick. Of the remaining 100 eggs, only 30 survived the infectious coryza. Each full-grown second-generation chickens weighed barely 1.5 kilo and produced lower return on investment.

Growing Enterprise

Two months into his agri-enterprise, Cristian decided to diversify his FRC stock to produce more eggs and bigger chickens.

From the sale of Dekalb chicks, he started his brood of heritage chicken with a capacity of 250 eggs per year. From his Animal Science classes, he sought out fertile eggs of specialized breeds from local breeder farms – Barred Plymouth Rock, Rhode Island Red, and Black Australorp. Cristian culled out many of the hatched eggs which turned out to be roosters to cut costs for feeds. He focused on raising egg-type hens to produce incubated hatchlings for breeding for breeding purposes. He also produced table-type eggs for sale.

Nevertheless, the culled chickens served the purpose of providing

protein for the family, and for customers.

Costs and Benefits

Cristian's Starter Kit arrived a month after the Binhi training. Cost of building the chicken house amounted to Php 3,000 for bamboo poles and Php 2,500 for the net used as fencing material. An old tent served as roof.

The 2x3 meter earth flooring is lined with rice hull. The rice hull prevents the foul odor from the chicken manure. Buyers get the decomposed rice hull and chicken manure at Php 75 per sack. The materials served as soil conditioner or soil enhancer in growing crops.

Cristian estimated his net income from table-type eggs, culled meat, and hatchlings as a big help for his family.

As he would be spending five days a week in school, Cristian's mother and father – a Barangay Health Worker and a farmer, respectively – helped him take care of the chickens. Gil, his eldest brother and a welder in the construction business, would feed the chickens in the morning before going off to work.

The youngest among four siblings, Cristian observed that other than the income and additional food source from his enterprise, it enriched the bonds of relationship in their family as they helped one another and took turns in doing the tasks.

Expanding Influence

His brother Gil seemed to have gained interest on agribusi-

ness because of Cristian's project. As Cristian relocated the chicken house from an abandoned pigpen to a flood-proof location, Gil helped Cristian buy the bamboo poles for the chicken house. Gil decided to raise fatter pigs in the pigpen.

Cristian's neighbors and friends also took up chicken production and bought hatchlings from him.

In December 2021, after the Binhi ng Pag-asa training, Cristian's team conducted a two-day training for 40 youths in the municipality. Aiming to give the knowledge they gained to more young people, the BPP trainers teamed up with the Municipal Agriculture Office to discuss swine and poultry, as well as leadership. Cristian discussed topics related to leadership.

In 2022, Cristian added 100 RIR-Dekalb crossbreed chickens to his stock as provincial winner of the Department of Agriculture's Young Farmers Challenge.

Cristian is sought in his community by neighbors who want to buy eggs and hatchlings from him. Still, social media marketing is part of Cristian's farming strategies. He posts photos on Facebook Stories, My Day, Group Chat, and Marketplace to subtly put his message across – pointing out that selling animals in this social media platform is prohibited.

Farming Future

Cristian is decided to pursue farming in the future. With his growing poultry population, Cristian wanted to relocate his poultry farm in an area away from residences so as to avoid people-borne diseases. His farm's name? "Sab's Eggstraordinary FRC."

To gain knowledge and skills in agriculture, he planned to work



initially in various farms after College graduation before tilling his own soil. He observed that growing rice in a one-hectare farm, as his father did, is not very profitable. Along with rice, he wanted to grow fish and high-value crops.

In the meantime, Cristian is preparing for his enterprise project in 4th year College, and he is determined. "Padagos na po talaga kasi pag-abot kong fourth year magagamit ko, igwa na akong sadiri kong enterprise. Pag-abot kong fourth year dai na ako mapara-gastos dakul ta first to second year nakapag-start na akong enterprise, existing na, ma-expand na lang."



A WORK FROM HOME

Ellysa Beatriz Muni, 21 years old, received invitation to attend the Binhi ng Pag-asa Program (BPP) Municipal Training in October 2021. Taking up BS Computer Science at Bicol University, the training seemed a far cry from her future career path.

After the training, she received an agri-livelihood starter kit consisting of 15 Rhode Island Reds (RIR), together with two sacks layer feeds. She learned a lot about free-range chicken farming from her home-based agri-enterprise.

Bea recognizes the Binhi ng Pag-asa Training as having enriched her family's way of life. As a student, it was a revelation that she could already earn some income while she was staying in her home.

A Few Obstacles

Bea said almost as soon as she got the chickens, they came down with a cold. Bea had to figure out how to treat them using the Organic Herbal Nutrient (OHN) which was taught during the BPP training to prepare the youths for their agri-enterprise.

"Open po ito dati, may mga native na manok, konti lang. Nang nakasali sa Binhi, gumawa kami ng tent. Maulan kasi dito, gumawa kami ng tent para hindi masyadong ma-stress ang manok," she narrated.

When the chickens laid fewer eggs, she prepared Calcium Phosphate (CalPhos) from eggshells, which was also part of the training she attended. She mixed Cal-Phos with the feeds. This helped increase the number of eggs laid by the hens.

Bea's starter kit consisted of two roosters and 13 hens. Thus, she was producing fertile eggs – she could actually hatch the eggs to produce second-generation RIR chicks. Eventually, she transitioned from layer to breeder feeds to produce fertile eggs.

The high cost of feeds is also one of the challenges met by Bea. To lower the cost, Bea used rice bran. She wanted to start growing crops that will serve as alternative feed-stuff source for the chickens.

A Little Help

Despite the various challenges she met, Bea shared that she still wanted to keep doing free-range chicken (FRC) production. Before the project, she knew nothing about chicken production. Now, she knew what to do when the chickens catch cold, and how to make them lay eggs.

"Sa morning, pag wala akong pasok nagbabahog ako 6:30-7 sa umaga. Pag may pasok po ako, mga kapatid ko o si mama Naman. Pag wala kaming pasok lahat, dito kami, naglil-inis, nagpapalit ng rice hull, tulong-tulong. Parang family bonding na rin, nagkaroon ng extra income. Naengganyo rin kasi pag bagong hatched ang cute ng mga sisiw," Bea recounted.

With the help of her mother, who worked at the Albay Provincial Agriculture Office (APAO), Bea had the fertile eggs incubated at APAO to produce hatchlings. At two months old, the hatchlings were sold at Php 250 per piece.

The buyers were family acquaintances or people from the nearby municipalities of Camalig and Guinobatan, as well as Ligao City. To market the eggs, her mother would post the photos and information on Facebook, while Bea and her siblings would share the post. Her father, an ambulance driver who works in a nearby city, also helps Bea sell the RIR eggs to his co-workers.

After a year, the first-generation RIR had stopped producing eggs. Bea used the income from the sale of the chicks to produce more eggs and bigger chickens. "Nag-stop silang production for two months. One year old na sila. Bumili kami ng second batch of chicken na RIR para ma-extend ang business. (They stopped production for two months. They are one year old now. We bought the second batch of RIR chickens to extend our business.)"

Bea also sells fertile eggs at

Php 25 each, and table-type eggs at Php 10 each. The income served as circulating fund to buy feeds for the chickens. She also supplemented the feed by combining with it left-over vegetables from the market.

She said they earned approximately Php 10,000 in one year because they spent for feeds and housing materials.

A Lot of Possibilities

Bea has a talent for baking, and she finds good use for the eggs during special occasions. Her livelihood project also ensured that their family has a ready supply of fresh eggs. Bea said they rarely buy eggs now.

Bea plans to produce more fertile eggs to produce hatchlings and breeder hens.

She also credited to her project intangible benefits. "Natutunan ko po na maging matiyaga. Kailangang maalaga sa manok kasi medyo maselan sila, mamonitor sila araw-araw. Mga 4:00 or bago gumabi, kailangang ma-feed na sila."

Using the internet, particularly apps such as Google or YouTube, Bea looked for more information on chicken production.

She plans to grow crops that will serve as feeds for the chickens. She will sustain her project. "Continuous pa po sya, hanggang maka-graduate po ako. Pakatapos mag-graduate, may free time, makaka-concentrate na po ako rito. Ang plano ko po egg at chicken production para mas mapalago ko ang business."

Bea expressed her thanks for the chance to attend the BPP training. She wished other youths would also have the chance to experience the opportunities given her, "Para maengganyo sila, extra income din nila."



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