

VOLUME 8 ISSUE NO. 3 | ISSN 2704-4343

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THE OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE AGRICULTURAL TRAINING INSTITUTE-REGIONAL TRAINING CENTER VIII



THE OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE
AGRICULTURAL TRAINING INSTITUTE
REGIONAL TRAINING CENTER 8



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This publication is quarterly published
by the

**Agricultural Training Institute -
Regional Training Center VIII,**
Visayas State University Campus,
Baybay City, Leyte, Philippines

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Republic of the Philippines
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Pooling training expertise for Eastern Visayas coco farmers

Much change can be expected for the coconut industry which has been plagued with different issues, from production to processing of coco-based products. In fact, these issues have affected the potential earning power the industry could give to its farmers. However, hope is not lost as the government led by the Philippine Coconut Authority (PCA) and its partner agencies actively implements the Coconut Farmers and Industry Development Plan (CFIDP).

Part of its commitment as the extension arm of the Department of Agriculture (DA), the Agricultural Training Institute Regional Training Center 8 (ATI RTC 8), conducted several trainings of trainers to create a pool of resource persons who will handle various knowledge and skills transfer activities for the coconut farmers in the Eastern Visayas.

Training of Trainers on Coconut-Cacao Farming System

Cacao has long been grown solo or as a monoculture. Current development in integrated farming systems have seen that cacao can thrive under coconut trees. The government is promoting integrated farming systems including that for coconut to maximize land use and added income for the farming family. This training enhanced the participants' knowledge and skills in the coconut-cacao farming system and be able to deliver topics effectively and efficiently as trainers on the coconut-cacao farming system enterprise. Twenty (20) Agricultural Extension Workers (AEWs) and coconut farmers

were capacitated about the cacao industry in the country. Further, they were skilled on cacao propagation techniques, nursery establishment and management, cacao plantation establishment, cacao cropping system, its care and maintenance, major pests and diseases and its management, nutrient management, and cacao harvesting and postharvest operations. Part of the training was to also enhance the skills of the participants in terms of facilitation as they will handle their own trainings.

Hands-on activities are vital during a training like this. The participants applied their learnings from the discussions in the field. They did actual field layout for cacao-coconut integration and even planted

cacao seedlings. In their visit at the Agriable Farm in Javier, Leyte, they did pruning activities (formative and rejuvenation), fertilizer application, and harvesting and post-harvest operations. Mr. Alfredo Ruales, an AEW from Abuyog, Leyte, appreciated how ATI RTC 8 conducted the training. He lamented that, "Basta ATI ang magtraining, han-ay tanan tikang pagkaon kutob katurug. An mga facilitators ngan resource person kay mag-upay. Diri la hira basta-basta kay full of experience sila ug mga expert." Mr. Ruales also pondered on what one of the RPs said. They were told that whatever enters the heart must reach the hands so that it will actually be used or applied at the field.

The training was conducted on July 10-14, 2023 at the Abuyog Experiment Station, Brgy. Balinsasayao, Abuyog, Leyte.



TOT on Value-Adding for Coconut Products Batch 3



Value addition for any crop may increase revenues for the farmer. As the government is promoting farming systems integration to provide more income for producers, value addition for coconut is also one key step to take for farmers.

ATI RTC 8 conducted the 3rd batch of the TOT on Value Adding for Coconut Products to capacitate AEWs and farmers to effectively deliver topics related to the production of coconut products and by-products. Topics during the training included: opportunities in coconut production; the Good Manufacturing Practices on coconut food processing; demonstration on the processing of food coconut products and by-products; break-even analysis for

coconut products and by-products; and the labelling and packaging processes.

The twenty-one (21) participants learned how to make coco husk, coco peat, and fashion accessories from coconut shells. It was observed that there is a need to benchmark in other regions with coconut processing facilities complete with processing equipment. The participants were amazed with the products that can be made of coconut materials that were once thought of as waste.

According to Mr. Manuel Versoza II, a coconut processor from Zumarraga, Samar, "The training is a complete package, from the objectives to the trainer and facilitators, even the sequence of the presentations and topics." He

also added that the activities made the training and memorable experience.

The Center-based training was conducted on July 10-14, 2023. The participants made re-entry plans which will be monitored in six months by the ATI RTC 8.





Training of Trainers on GAP for Coconut

While the market is ripe for coconut and its products, there is a need to ensure that these products meet food safety standards. One way to make sure that farmers are producing quality coconuts and coco-based products is to capacitate them with proper knowledge and skills on GAP on Coconut production for certification.

Farmers and Agricultural Extension Workers (AEWs) were trained on the different aspects of Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) in Coconut Production. Also, the participants were given tips in facilitation and presentation. The participants drafted a GAP-compliant Farm Plan, filled up an application form on PhilGAP (BPI Form F1), drafted a manual on GAP on Coconut production, filled up template on farm records (BPI Forms), and made a Re-entry Plan for training or related

activities on GAP on Coconut Production.

Participants realized the importance of producing safety products for the consumers. They familiarized themselves with the necessary practices to be done in the GAP-certified farm. They also visited one learning site in Baybay City, Leyte which was GAP-certified.

Participants appreciated the various workshops in the training regarding the different documents needed in GAP certification. It familiarized them on the preparation of necessary documents should they opt to apply for GAP certification. The ACIAR Project staff which is implementing a GAP project in the region also expressed their eagerness to assess those participants who are interested in applying for GAP Certification. Participants also appreciated

the farm visit activity to selected GAP certified farms in Baybay. They were able to observe their various facilities in the farm as well as their different record books. Through the farm visit activity, they also witnessed that you can be a GAP certified farm even if you're just using light materials for your facilities.

Ms. Amor S. Oracion, a farm staff from Casa Cornelio FarmTech in Brgy. Bobon, Baybay City, was thankful for the 5-day training. She shared that even then during the time of her in-laws, ATI had given good service. She added that now, with the addition of other agencies such as TESDA, more farmers will benefit from trainings.

The training was conducted at ATI-RTC 8, VSU, ViSCA, Baybay City, Leyte from July 24-28, 2023.

Training of Trainers on Coconut Farm Business School

Farming is a business. Coconut farmers need to understand this to level up their production and earning potential. ATI RTC 8 conducted a training to capacitate AEWs and farmers on the different aspects of coconut farming as a business. In turn, they will conduct the Coconut Farm Business School in their respective areas.

The participants were taught about the main points of the Philippine Coconut Industry and the CFIDP; the differences of a farm business from an enterprise; implementation of the Farm Business Cycle as a process in Farm Improvement; and improvement options out of the challenges in operating a coconut farm business.

The 10-day training saw participants learning about the competencies to make a business successful: opportunity seeking and initiative, risk taking, demand for efficiency and quality, persistence, commitment to the work, information seeking,

goal setting, systematic planning and monitoring, persuasion and networking, independence, and self-confidence.

According to Mr. Sofronio T. Lipata, Jr, an AT form Palapag, N. Samar, "In my five years as agricultural extension workers this is my first time attending training in ATI-RTC 8. I would say that this is the best training I have attended. The resource persons were all knowledgeable and expert on their topics. I admired the way they imparted their knowledge and skills. I enjoyed all the workshops and group activities as well as learning at the same time. This training would be a great help to our farmers since they will be taught on how to be successful entrepreneurs and sustain their farm businesses. I am very grateful to be part of this training, thank you so much ATI-RTC 8."

The Center-based activity was conducted on Aug. 14-23, 2023.





DIGITAL AGRICULTURE

**Making way for digital literacy
for improved farming**

Northern Samar farmers embrace SATs

Mobile phones are fast becoming a very potent tool for farmers to use in making decisions for their farm. With the plethora of agriculture-based applications now, farmers need to learn how to navigate the internet and social media and master the use of the mobile phone. This year, under the Digital Farmers Program, ATI RTC 8 conducted the Training on Smart Agriculture Technologies (SATs) Phase 1 and Phase 2.

Participants to the training were farmers and youth from Brgy. Macagtas, Catarman, Northern Samar. During Phase 1 of SATs, it employed the DFP 101 and 102 to encourage farmers to utilize technologies in farming. This training will particularly focus on basic and in-depth applications in agriculture and e-commerce and usage of social media and smartphones in boosting their farm productivity. They learned about the parts of the mobile phone, basic and advanced agri apps, social media marketing, e-commerce, and internet safety, while some of the participants were already using social media, only 2 were using it to earn money thru selling their produce in Facebook.

For SATs Phase 2, the participants were trained in the DFP 103 for Rice. The program intends to create future-ready rice farmers by introducing smart agriculture technology, showing farmers the importance and benefits of SATs and how it can easily and quickly answer different rice farming challenges throughout the entire rice farming process. Under SATs Phase 2, participants learned about the use of drone technology for rice farming.

Aquilina Mataba, a rice farmer, was very thankful to have attended the 2 phases of SATs. She said, "I am thankful to the government for making activities such as this. I learned a lot especially on the phase 2 of this training. I appreciated the Binhing Palay app, RCMAS, and LCC. Controlling pests and weeds also stirred my interest with the PRIME and eDamuhan. I



Participant showing the different parts of the smartphone and their uses during their discussion on Smartphone101.



Participant using the Leaf Color Chart to identify the nutrient deficiencies of a Rice plant through its leaves.



Resource Person, BJLSinon setting the GPS device as participants try measuring the rice field for the RCMAS activity.

also stirred my interest with the PRIME and eDamuhan. I was excited for the drone technology. Thank you very much to the facilitators and resource persons. I learned a lot of things. Before, I only used my phone for leisure, calls, and texts but now, as a farmer, it is an important tool that could help me in my farm."

Sol Amoranto, one of the participants who was selling lettuce online, shared, "Thank you so much ATI for teaching us. We learned a lot about Smart Agriculture. The facilitators were lively. My fellow farmers were very participative during the activities. Thank you to the technicians who facilitated as well."



Lavesarez Municipal Agriculturist, Ms. Estrella Ofiana talks with New Hope technician for future partnerships with the LGU-Lavesarez for drone tech.



Participants try out some photography techniques as he takes photos of their communal garden after their Basic smartphone photography lecture.

I learned a lot of things. Before, I only used my phone for leisure, calls, and texts but now, as a farmer, it is an important tool that could help me in my farm. ~Aquilina Mataba, Participant



Drone service providers from New Hope showed participants how to setup the drone for fertilizer application during their demo in Lavesarez, Northern Samar.

After the conduct of SATs, the same participants joined the DFP Farm Connect activity wherein the participants were able to observe firsthand the operation of agriculture drone technology in providing specific service such as fertilizer application. The participants were able to assess the value of using agriculture drones in rice farming. Aside from the LGU-Catarman, AEWs from LGU-Lavezares, N. Samar were also able to witness the use of the technology hence they were excited to discuss with the service provider possibilities in using such technology in seeding.

SATs Phase 1 was conducted on August 29-September 1 while SATs Phase 2 was conducted on September 13-15, 2023 in Northern Samar. DFP Farm Connect was done on Sept. 28-29, 2023 in Catarman and

E. Samar farmers and youth learn DFP



Borongan City farmers and youth trained in the Digital Farmers Program 101 and 102 modules under the Training on Package of Technologies (PoT). The training capacitated participants with the knowledge and skills to venture into digital marketing using social media and e-commerce platforms.

The participants were members of the Surok Irrigators Association in Borongan City, E. Samar. They were expected to teach other farmers and youth about the Digital Farmers Program. The association is set to receive a Package of Technologies that will help them in promoting digital literacy among farmers and youth in their area.

The participants enjoyed learning about the digital agriculture apps. In fact, even the youth were amazed at the apps available for the farmers. Like their counterparts in Northern Samar, some of the participants, especially the youth, were engaged in online selling. They were able to share their experiences. They were excited about learning how to use Canva because they can use it to improve the social media posts. The farmers looked forward to learning about DFP 103 in the future.

Rosalyna Baybin, a farmer-participant, was thankful for the opportunity, "I am thankful to the resource persons for the things they taught us. It was a big deal for me to learn about how to use the smartphone. I now know how to check the weather, identify diseases without relying on our technicians. Thank you so much."

Abegail Baldo, a youth-farmer participant, shared, "On behalf of our association, it is indeed an honor to be invited and to participate in this activity. As an online seller, it is a big help because it added more knowledge on how I could sell my products and how to promote them. From e-commerce applications to farming apps, I just learned that there are these resources that could help identify pests and diseases. I now know what pests are damaging my farm whenever I apply for insurance. As a youth, it was a big help that not only did it teach us, but we too could teach our senior farmers."

The training was conducted on Sept. 20-22, 2023 at Enderio's Farm in Borongan City, E. Samar.



Empowering Saint Bernard Farmers thru DFP

The Department of Agriculture in the country is gearing up to revamp its agricultural sector, placing a strong emphasis on the adoption of digital agriculture. This strategic move is designed to empower farmers in making informed decisions regarding the production and promotion of their agricultural products, opening up numerous avenues for growth and advancement within the farming community.

As part of this initiative, the Agricultural Training Institute Regional Training Center 8 (ATI-RTC 8) recently conducted a batch of the Digital Farmers

Program 101 and 102 for farmers in Saint Bernard, Southern Leyte.

Farmers, including those of advanced age, eagerly embraced the challenge of familiarizing themselves with modern practices in agriculture and online marketing. Assisted by their younger counterparts, they delved into various basic and advanced agricultural apps that could prove beneficial in their respective farms.

A key focus of the program was on social media marketing for farm products, equipping participants with the skills to

promote and sell their goods online. Participants created social media marketing calendars to plan and organize content for their Facebook Pages. Additionally, they learned to develop eye-catching social media posters for their products, aimed at capturing the attention of potential online customers.

"I may be 65 years old, but I still attended the training because I believe that a person's ability to learn has no limits," explained Mr. Dioscoro Constantino, one of the participants. Constantino, who had never used a smartphone before, shared that he

previously relied on traditional methods, going around his neighborhood to sell products. However, the training opened his eyes to the possibilities of using the phone for online sales, emphasizing that farming requires both hard work and knowledge.

Youth participant Ms. Mylien Labod expressed her satisfaction in assisting with the digitalization of services for Saint Bernard farmers. "When the youth and farmers work hand in hand, there will be an advancement in agriculture," she remarked, hopeful for improvements in the agricultural sector of Saint Bernard.

A total of 22 farmers and youth participants actively participated in the three-day training on Digital Farmers Program 101 and 102 from August 9-11, 2023. The success of the activity was made possible through the support of the Municipal Agriculture Office of Saint Bernard, along with resource persons Ms. Berlin Espenido, Ms. Esterlita Pagador, and Mr. Jayson Animas, trained trainers from the DFP 101 and 102 Training of Trainers held in 2022. This initiative marks a significant step toward a more technologically advanced and knowledge-driven future for agriculture in the region.

"I may be 65 years old, but I still attended the training because I believe that a person's ability to learn has no limits." ~ Dioscoro Constantino, Participant



Eastern Visayas SOA-SRA concludes with 2,244 Graduates

In a momentous occasion, a total of 2,244 farmer-enrollees celebrated their graduation from the 3-month School on-the-Air on Smart Rice Agriculture (SOA-SRA) during a Virtual Mass Graduation ceremony held on November 10, 2023.

Commencing in July 2023 and concluding in September of the same year, the SOA-Smart Rice Agriculture: Palay Aralan Makabagong Pagsasaka sa Himpapawid aimed to equip farmers with modern rice farming techniques using radio and social media platforms. ATI-RTC 8 spearheaded the coordination of the program in collaboration with the Department of Agriculture-Regional Field Office 8 and various municipalities under the LGUs in Northern Samar and Southern Leyte provinces.

The top graduate for this year, Mr. Alfredo B. Dolojan from Bontoc, Southern Leyte, expressed gratitude through a video message, acknowledging the collective effort that led to the success of the SOA. He shared, "It was a dream for me to be a very productive rice farmer. That is why I try my best to attend activities and educate myself about anything related to rice farming to alleviate our family's way of living." Dolojan highlighted his learnings on topics such as the PalayCheck

system, seed selection, post-harvesting, and other smart agriculture technologies. He expressed hope for more training and activities in the future to further enhance farmers' knowledge and practices.

The Overall Top 5 graduates for this year's Palay Aralan are as follows:

1. Alfredo B. Dolojan – Bontoc, Southern Leyte
2. Velma F. Salgado – Allen, Northern Samar
3. Cristita B. Cabarubias – Malitbog, Southern Leyte
4. Ligenard Estorba – Saint Bernard, Southern Leyte
5. Rio Bitangga – Macrohon, Southern Leyte

Melinda Petalcorin, the Information Services Section Chief, congratulated the participants and facilitators during the graduation ceremony. She shared her hope for a positive change in the lives of farmer graduates after completing the 3-month program. Petalcorin emphasized that the success of the activity lies not only in funding or course improvement but in the thirst for knowledge among farmers, support from LGUs, and the dedication of facilitators.





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