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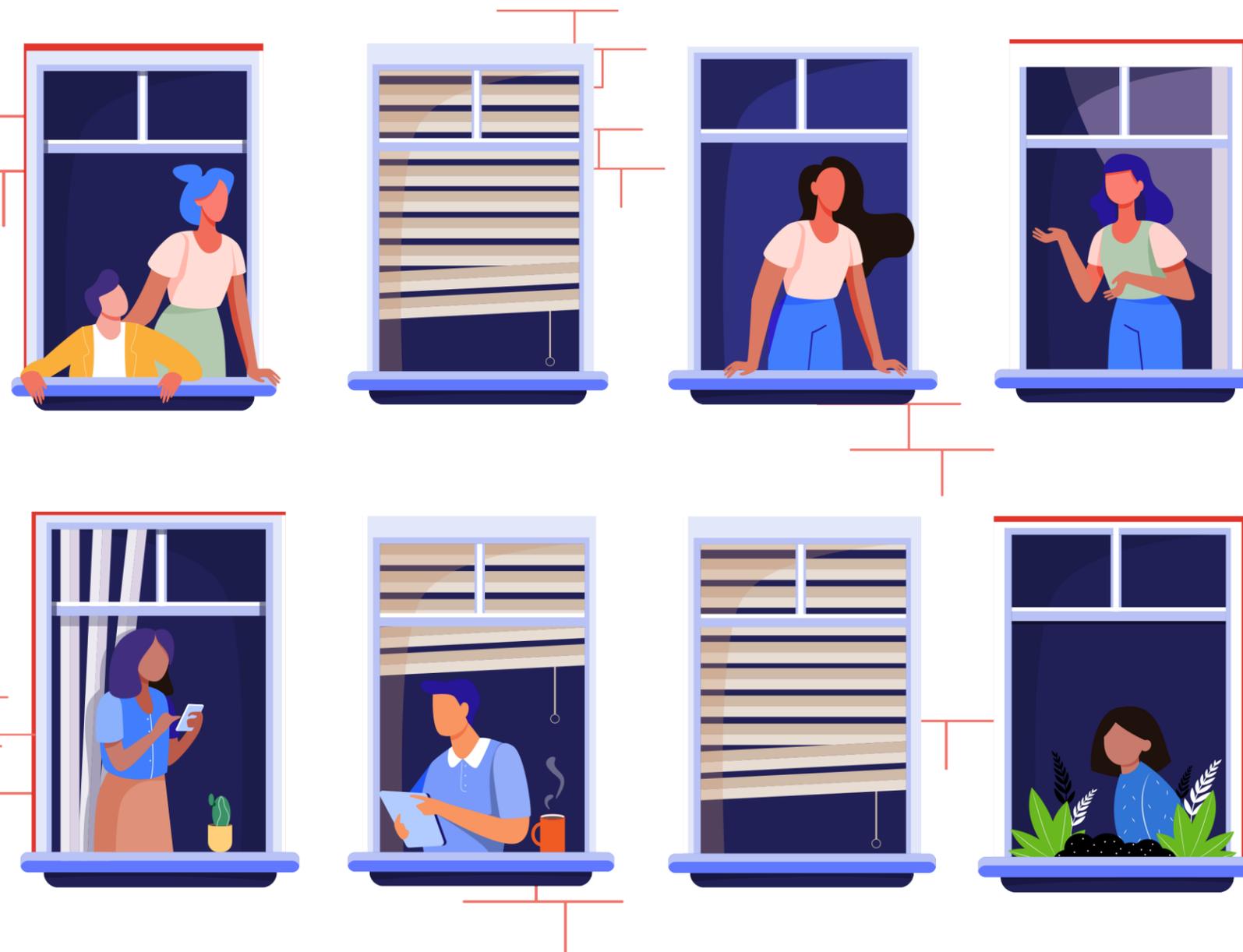
# ACCESS

The Official Publication of the Agricultural Training Institute



**2020**

IN RETROSPECT



## CONTENTS

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <p><b>01</b> Digital Literacy Continues for Farmers Across Regions<br/><b>NEWS</b></p>                                     | <p><b>11</b> Different Weapons to Push Constant Education<br/><b>NEWS FEATURE</b></p>                        |
| <p><b>02</b> The SOA Must Go On: Schools-on-the-Air for Apayao and Kalinga Remain on Air Amid COVID-19<br/><b>NEWS</b></p> | <p><b>15</b> Gawad Saka Recognizes Hard Work of Farmers, Fishers Amid Pandemic<br/><b>NEWS</b></p>           |
| <p><b>04</b> Food Availability Comes Easy with Urban Agri<br/><b>NEWS FEATURE</b></p>                                      | <p><b>16</b> 2019 Rice Achievers Awards Celebrate Lifelong Service of Industry Champions<br/><b>NEWS</b></p> |
| <p><b>07</b> Sec. Dar Awards Extension Projects, Machines in Region 2<br/><b>NEWS</b></p>                                  | <p><b>17</b> Faith in PH Agriculture<br/><b>NEWS FEATURE</b></p>   |
| <p><b>08</b> Youth Scholars Pursue Agriculture, Agri-Related Courses under ATI's EAsY Agri Program<br/><b>NEWS</b></p>     | <p><b>21</b> Embracing New Normal on Extension Delivery<br/><b>INSIGHTS</b></p>                              |
| <p><b>09</b> On Fragility and Resiliency: 2020 Training and Advisory Efforts at a Glance<br/><b>FEATURE</b></p>            |  |

# Digital Literacy Continues for Farmers Across Regions

Angelica Marie Umali

More farmers are taking on the challenge to become future-ready as they participate in the first level of the Digital Farmers Program (DFP), the DFP 101.

While pushing for a digitally-inclusive agriculture sector despite the uncertainties brought on by the pandemic, the program team ensured that safety of all will be prioritized as well. In this line, both online and face-to-face modes of delivery—with strict regard to health protocols—were implemented.

By the end of the session, farmers were acquainted with the basic parts and uses of a smartphone, access the Internet, as well as introduced to social media and basic agriculture applications such as weather monitoring, e-Learning, and land area measurement tools.

*“Malaking tulong ito na mas madaling makikilala ang mga produkto namin lalo na sa pandemiyang hinaharap. Malaking tulong ito sa aming magsasaka at RIC (rural improvement club) sa probinsya. Nakakuwa na malaman na marami palang magagawa gamit lamang ang smartphone,”* Perlita Abaco, a farmer-participant in the DFP 101 Bataan leg, shared. [This is a big help for us farmers and members of RICs in provinces to promote our products especially during this pandemic. It is nice to know that there is so much you can do with a smartphone.]

Likewise, the youth-participants—who are more tech-savvy—took time to guide their farmer-partners in maximizing the use of their smartphones, getting resources from the Internet, and venture into online selling.

“DFP 101 helped enable farmers to gain knowledge on how to promote their products online. They no longer need to physically vend their products. Since it is online, buyers come in fast and transactions between sellers and buyers are much easier,” Jeffrey Ciro Subayno, a youth-participant in Baybay, Leyte, noted.

The rollout concluded with a total of 31 batches—capacitating over 600 farmers and youth across regions—by the end of 2020. All DFP 101 finishers will be moving up to the second level of the program—the DFP 102—by the second semester of 2021.

The DFP is a ladderized capacity-building activity, spearheaded in partnership with Smart Communications Public Affairs. It engages the youth in a three-course sequence focusing on acquainting and empowering farmers starting from basic digital tools such as social media to more complex services such as e-commerce and online payment systems.#

# The SOA Must Go on: Schools-on-the-Air for Apayao and Kalinga Remain on Air Amid COVID-19

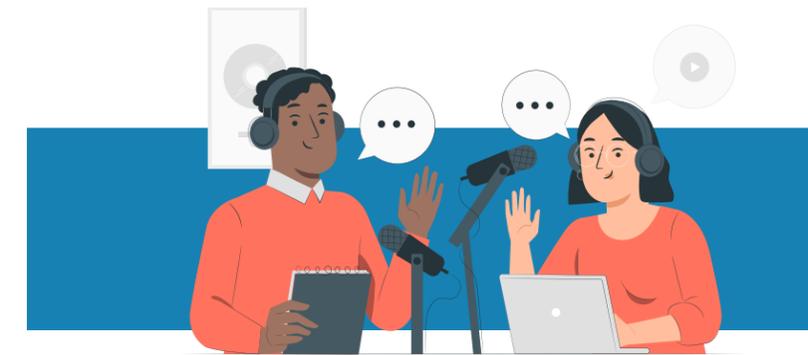
Adrian Chris Velasco

LA TRINIDAD, Benguet—Despite COVID-19 health risks, delivery of government services, particularly in agricultural extension, has to continue albeit some modifications. The Agricultural Training Institute (ATI), for its part, conceptualized the modified school-on-the-air (SOA) as one of its adaptation measures.

The SOA is an extension strategy where information on a particular subject or advocacy is disseminated through radio broadcasts. For ATI, it deals with a specific set of topics for a certain period following a module or a broadcast guide.

ATI in the Cordillera Administrative Region (CAR) has been running the SOA since 2013. Usually, one SOA is implemented covering one province for each year and is then moved to another province in the succeeding year to cover all the CAR provinces. However, with the threat of COVID-19 infection and the subsequent restrictions on large crowd gatherings, the ATI-CAR adopted the modified SOA strategy wherein, while still similar to the regular SOA in terms of implementation, there is a decreased target number of graduates from 500 to 300.

Moreover, the modified SOA skipped large crowd gathering activities such as the launching and graduation programs. The role of SOA coordinators from the partner local government units (LGUs) in the recruitment, enrollment, administration of quizzes and exams, and monitoring of enrollees was also enhanced. They, along with partner radio stations, were also encouraged to share, through social media, the highlights of the broadcasts and of their other SOA-related activities.



In 2020, ATI-CAR SOA covered the provinces of Apayao and Kalinga. In Apayao, it promoted the Palay Check System for hybrid rice production. Rice farmers from the municipalities of Flora, Luna, Pudto, and Sta. Marcela were the target participants. Hosting the SOA is the BZNQ – FM 96.7 Radyo Kasaranay of the Apayao State College (ASC) – Luna Campus in Luna, Apayao. The program started airing on August 29, 2020 and broadcasted until October 31, 2020 every Tuesday, Saturday, and Sunday from 6:00 AM to 7:00 AM. The broadcasts can also be viewed on Facebook via @96.7 FM Radyo Kasaranay, and @Ati Cordillera.

Meanwhile in Kalinga, the SOA hit the airwaves covering Tabuk City and the municipality of Rizal. This SOA is one of the extension interventions under the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (RCEF) of R.A. No. 11203 or the Rice Tariffication Law. It promoted the Palay Check System for inbred rice production. ATI-CAR partnered with the DZRK 837 AM Radyo Pilipinas Tabuk, and the LGU of Rizal and Tabuk City, through their respective municipal and city agriculture offices, in running the program. The broadcast started on August 3, 2020 and aired until October 31, 2020 every Monday from 11:00 AM to 12:00 PM.#





FOOD AVAILABILITY COMES EASY WITH  
**URBAN AGRI**  
Jayvee Masilang

Food needs to be available anytime.

This is not a campaign or a motto or an announcement. This is reality. We all need food for our everyday life, and during these times of a pandemic, we need it more than ever.

This is why the ongoing urban agriculture initiative of the Agricultural Training Institute (ATI) is beneficial to everyone as it allows us to grow our own food in the comforts of our own home.

Given the hindrances caused by the pandemic, having the knowledge to produce our own food lessens the burden of actually going outside and risking our health. Thankfully, learning platforms for urban agriculture were sustained in 2020, even with pandemic-related protocols, with the use of free webinar series and other online channels.

Thousands of viewers nationwide participated in the initial episodes of AgriTalk 2020 featuring the basic how-to's of urban gardening. This series of free webinars is part of the Institute's urban agriculture initiative under the "Plant, Plant, Plant" Program.

**"I APPRECIATE HOW YOU SHOWED THAT AGRICULTURE IS NOT ONLY SEEN IN FARMS, BUT IS ALSO POSSIBLE WITHIN THE CORNERS OF OUR HOMES."**

It aims to expand, and sustain the interest of the public in growing their own food especially amid the global pandemic. This activity is in collaboration with the Agriculture Magazine, and supported by the Manila Bulletin Publishing Corporation, and Smart Communications, Inc.

Carlo Sumaoang, owner of an ATI-certified Learning Site for Agriculture in Central Luzon, served as the resource speaker for the first two episodes which were streamed on December 12-13, 2020. The first one covered the six fundamental considerations in urban farming while the second episode focused on seed growing and basic plant growth stages.

One participant from Tarlac, Galilmia Lagade, shared her insight on the

activity. "I appreciate how you showed that agriculture is not only seen in farms, but is also possible within the corners of our homes," she said.

Likewise, a student participant from San Ildefonso, Bulacan, remarked that the activity helped her understand farming basics given her limited experience in agriculture. "Since I have zero experience in agriculture, I liked how the speaker clearly explained the process of starting how to grow plants in the comfort of our own homes, and that starting my planting journey isn't so hard after all," she stated.

Meanwhile, plantitos and plantitas can now apply urban agriculture technologies within their community as the ATI and the Department of Agriculture (DA) continued to serve more agri enthusiasts in the metro with the establishment of "Greenhouse Village".

The DA, through the ATI, has partnered with four barangays in Caloocan and Quezon cities for the said project in support to the "Plant, Plant, Plant" Program. The signing of the Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) for the establishment of the initial four greenhouse villages was held on December 15, 2020 at the ATI Mess Hall in Diliman, Quezon City.

During the MOA signing, ATI Assistant Director Rosana Mula encouraged the barangay officials to promote urban agriculture technologies to their neighboring barangays. Engr. Renato Dela Cruz, chief of the ATI-Partnerships and Accreditation Division, also thanked the barangay officials for their participation in the project and looked forward to partnering with their respective communities to boost the promotion of urban agriculture.



Under the partnership, the Institute will provide funding assistance for the establishment of a Greenhouse Village per barangay. This will feature one unit of high greenhouse with an administration office and storage area; one unit of seedling nursery with micro sprinkler irrigation; and one unit of production area with drip kit irrigation system. Ten sessions of training program from the construction phase until harvest time will also be covered by the ATI.

Through this undertaking, the DA and ATI aim to showcase doable technologies of protective farming system. Likewise, this is to increase the production of vegetables and to make these available in the

barangay level throughout the year, amid varying weather conditions.

When these "Greenhouse Villages" are already in full operation, make sure to drop by to learn more about urban farming. Just remember to follow health and safety protocols for everyone's protection.

For videos and updates related to urban farming, including AgriTalk episodes, visit the ATI Facebook page at [www.facebook.com/atiinteractive](http://www.facebook.com/atiinteractive).

Through urban agriculture, growing our own food is the "new normal". (with reports from Marianne Antonio and Catheryn Villoriente) #

## Sec. Dar awards extension projects, machines in Region 2

Vladimir Caliguiran

Department of Agriculture (DA) Secretary William D. Dar led the awarding of various projects to different farmers' groups and local government units (LGUs) in Region 02 during his quick visit on September 30 at Agricultural Training Institute-Regional Training Center (ATI-RTC) 2, San Mateo, Isabela.

Among the projects that were awarded are the extension support and Certificate of Learning Sites for Agriculture under the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund Extension Project. Christian Paulo R. Magsino of BH Roque Integrated Farm in Santiago City and Jennelyn A. Lorenzo of Lorenzo Integrated Farm in San Pablo, San Mariano, Isabela received their certificate from Dar, Isabela Governor Rodito T. Albano III, DA Regional Executive Director Narciso A. Edillo, and ATI-RTC 2 Director Imelda M. Guillermo.

Moreover, four LGU Farmers' Information and Technology Services Centers were awarded with information and communication technology gadgets under the Rice Extension Program of ATI. The LGU FITS Centers of Dupax del Sur and Diadi in Nueva Vizcaya, and Gonzaga and Sta. Teresita in Cagayan were given two units of tablet, WiFi modem, laptop computer, printer, GPS device, and reading materials.

In his speech, Dar happily announced that the Department has received additional funds for agri-fishery programs such as the provision of rice seeds and fertilizers to farmers. "*Hindi dapat magtipid sa paggamit ng fertilizer, kailangan natin ang pagtaas ng ani para sapat*

*na sapat ang ating pagkain* during this time of pandemic. *Alam ninyo, the only sector that grew this second quarter is agriculture...* *Dahil masisipag ang mga magsasaka, ang mga mangingisda, at ang mga LGU leaders natin; dahil sila ang katuwang natin sa kanayunan,"* he added.

Other projects that were awarded were eight units of hand tractors to four cooperators of farmers cooperatives and associations of the Rice Business Innovations; three units of hand tractors and vegetable seeds to rebel returnees in support to End Local Communist Armed Conflict in partnership with the 95th Infantry Division; and UV-treated PE film plastic, insect net, plastic mulch, and seedling trays to five farmers organizations in support to organic vegetable production.

The event was also attended by Isabela Vice Governor Faustino "Bojie" Dy III, local chief executives, board members, regional heads of different attached agencies and bureaus of the DA, extension workers, farmers, and other stakeholders.#



## Youth Scholars Pursue Agriculture, Agri-Related Courses under ATI's EAsY Agri Program

Kelly Alyza Evign Corcuera

In support to the Department of Agriculture's advocacy to entice the Filipino youth in leaning towards agriculture, 223 scholars from all over the country were recruited and accepted under the Agricultural Training Institute's (ATI) newest scholarship program - the Educational Assistance for the Youth: Degree Courses in Agriculture, and Agricultural and Biosystems Engineering or the EAsY Agri Program. This program is dedicated to children of small-scale farmers and fisherfolk to encourage them in pursuing a professional career in agriculture and fisheries or to venture in agri-entrepreneurship.

The EAsY Agri Program will run from 2020 to 2025 to cover the four-year program for the BS Agriculture and related courses and five-year program for the BS Agriculture and Biosystems Engineering (BS ABE).

To date, a total of 160 scholars have been accepted where 119 will take up BS Agriculture and the rest will enroll in courses on agribusiness, agricultural technology, agro-forestry, fisheries, forestry, and technology and livelihood education in agri-fishery arts. Meanwhile, 63 grantees are to pursue BS ABE. They are currently enrolled in different state universities and colleges (SUCs) where a

Memorandum of Agreement has been forged through the ATI Regional Training Centers (ATI-RTCs). To date, the ATI has partnered with 58 SUCs nationwide to ensure the delivery of quality education to all youth scholars.

With the current pandemic situation, the education system is greatly affected causing the late opening of academic year, the earliest of which was August 10, 2020 and the last was on October 16, 2020. From the traditional face-to-face mode of learning, partner SUCs are online, applying blended learning courses.

Some setbacks that scholars are experiencing are unstable internet connection as most of them live in remote areas with very weak signal to participate in their online classes. Others have no available laptops or tablets. Despite the limitations, the scholars are committed to do their best as they are closely monitored and guided by the scholarship point persons of the ATI-RTCs.

By the end of the program, the Institute is expecting to produce 223 youth scholar-graduates.#

ATI: On fragility and resiliency: 2020 training and advisory efforts at a glance



**GLOBAL HEALTH CRISIS:**  
Covid 19

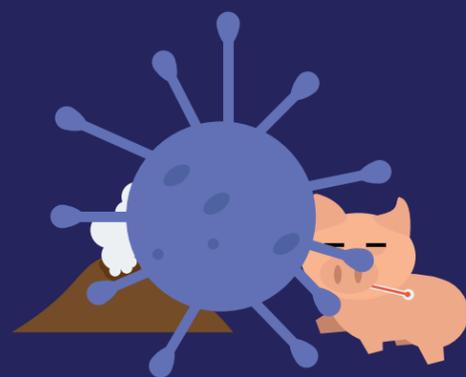


**FOOD SECURITY THREAT:**  
African swine fever



**NATURAL CALAMITY:**  
Taal Volcano eruption

The year 2020 has brought unprecedented challenges to all the sectors of the country especially agriculture and fisheries (AF). Series of devastating events, such as the Taal eruption, emergence of the African Swine Fever (ASF), and the continuing threats of the global health crisis, among others, have ultimately, tested the sector both in its fragility and resiliency. Despite the effects of these adversities, the sector, particularly in terms of its training and advisory services, shifted to a more digital landscape in accordance to the new normal.



The AF sector may have been pushed further in its vulnerability as it confronted adversities. However, the sector has still proven its capacities to be resilient and adaptable to the changing times. With this, the ATI seeks to pursue more inclusive, systematic, and strategic approaches to better serve the Filipino farmers and fishers in 2021 and beyond.

**ALTERNATIVE METHODS & STRATEGIES**  
Distance learning through modular, radio, television, or online platforms, intensifying the promotion and use of appropriate modern technologies.

**Campaign on: SUFFICIENT FOOD PRODUCTION**  
Over 300 different activities, including seminars, briefings, and trainings were conducted through ATI's Urban Agriculture Project under DA's Plant, Plant, Plant Program. Urban Agri starter kits, information, education and communication materials, as well as farm and business advisory were offered to more than 49,000 individuals.

**MAXIMIZED SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORM**  
Currently, there are 69 online certificate courses. About 24,415 e-Learners enrolled in the various e-Learning courses, of which 20,712 have already graduated.

**FAMILY FARMING**  
ATI conducted four (4) batches of consultative meeting and planning workshop for the development of the Philippine National Action Plan for Family Farming 2019-2028 with 101 participants.

**AFRICAN SWINE FEVER CONTROL**  
A total of 13 briefing/orientation/information caravans were conducted by the ATI in the Ilocos Norte, Northern Mindanao, and SOCCSKSARGEN with a total of 382 participants. Trainings on Biosecurity, Surveillance and Sample Collection for ASF Control, with 275 participants were conducted by the International Training Center on Pig Husbandry (ITCPH).

**WEBINAR SERIES**  
ATI's Free Seminar Series found a new space online through the AgriTalk in Metro Manila and in different regions of the country. School-on-the-air programs were also implemented by the ATI regional training centers.

**RICE EXTENSION SERVICES PROGRAM**  
Over 970 individuals were trained as trainers on the production of high-quality inbred rice and seeds and farm mechanization. Around 550 seed growers, inspectors, analysts, and other extension intermediaries also took part in the 24 training activities held for inbred rice seed production and seed certification.

**KAPATID AGRI-MENTOR ME**  
The program aims to sustain and scale-up the agri-business in the country, through mentorships. There were a total of 11 online trainings/webinars and mentoring conducted by ATI's network of training centers serving 486 participants.

The nationwide rollout of Digital Farmers Program (DFP) 101 was carried out through online and face-to-face modes of delivery for 31 batches or a total of 622 farmer and youth-participants. The first ever DFP virtual TOT was also conducted prior to the rollout.

To support the children of small-scale farmers and fishers, the EASY Agri scholarship program was launched for 2020-2025 for over 220 students nationwide.

# Different weapons to push constant education

Jayvee Masilang

Amid the occurrence of the pandemic, the Agricultural Training Institute (ATI) continued to provide an avenue for continuous learning for clients through training activities and seminars spearheaded by its network of training centers.

As the training arm of the Department of Agriculture (DA), the ATI doubled down on its efforts to reach its clients by using different strategies in implementing its programs and activities. Whether it be through social media or their website, e-Learning portal, online modules, blended approach, or even the usual face-to-face setup, the ATI network found ways to continue educating the clients while following pandemic-related protocols.



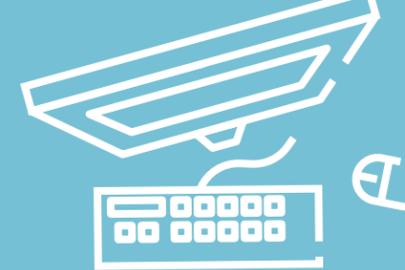
## Face-to-face training

Twenty two former rebels of the New People's Army (NPA) and some members of Philippine Army attended a skills training on Mushroom Production (Phase I), Processing and Marketing (Phase II) in a collaboration between ATI Northern Mindanao and the Philippine Army-403rd (Peacemaker) Brigade.

The training served as an avenue for peaceful coexistence and collaboration with the rebel returnees through farming. In addition, more technology and skills training will be given, as well as after training support such as spawns of oyster mushrooms and straw mushrooms.

OIC-Center Director Maria Lydia Echavez encouraged the participants to open their minds to the new knowledge, their hearts for the willingness to learn, and hands to accept new skills. She also urged them to share what they have learned not only with their family, but to others as well.

The five-day training also aimed to equip participants with technical knowledge and help develop their income-generating skills as they return to the mainstream society. It was conducted with proper health protocols and social distancing among 22 total participants on August 31 to September 4, 2020 at the 403rd Brigade, 41D, Philippine Army, Camp Osito D. Bahian, Impalambong, Malaybalay City, Bukidnon.



## e-Learning

On August 11, 2020, ATI Central Luzon implemented an orientation for e-Learning through a webinar among Tarlac Agricultural University (TAU) BS Agriculture students.

The activity maximized the use of information and communications technology (ICT) tools such as desktop, laptops, and smartphones to showcase the free online courses on different agricultural technologies, available at any place, pace, and time.

It was stressed that given the situation of the country, getting information and learning ideas through the internet is important among every sector.

“This is a good opportunity for the students to learn more on how ATI shares agriculture related information and technology to the farmers and other stakeholders,” quipped Jo-Anne Lynne Joy Duque.

The students were encouraged to finish the Basic Urban Agriculture e-Learning course to promote the production of food at their own backyard, together with at least two other courses of their choice to complete the activity.



## Online modules

Twenty nine successful mentees across Region 7 completed the Kapatid Agri Mentor Me Program (KAMMP-7), conducted by Go Negosyo and ATI Central Visayas. The virtual graduation ceremony was held last December 11, 2020.

The nine-module online program kicked off on October 2 with the opening program and Module 1 starting on October 6, as Module 9 ended last November 3.

KAMMP aims to nurture and sustain agri-business in the country through coaching and mentoring. Industry practitioners serve as mentors/coaches that provide guidance and assistance to agricultural cooperatives or associations, and agri enterprises by sharing what they've learned and experienced.

With COVID-19 upending lives and businesses all over the world, KAMMP becomes more relevant and necessary albeit in a virtual or digitalized form. Thus, the KAMMP Online is developed as the practical delivery mechanism for the same mentorship/coaching modules to be used to propel agri-preneurs to survive and thrive in spite of the unprecedented setbacks.

## Webinar series

The ATI also maximized the use of social media especially during the celebration of the National Rice Awareness Month (NRAM) in November 2020. The webinar series "RiceTalks" was launched and offered for free to promote the importance of the propagation and consumption of local rice.

Topics that were covered include practices in seed selection, integrated and intensified rice farming, nutrient management, post-harvest management, and processing. The benefits of brown rice and information and communications technology used in rice farming were also discussed.

Each episode, which featured one topic each for the morning and the afternoon sessions, was streamed live through Facebook. The recorded videos can be re-watched on the respective pages of the ATI Regional Training Centers (RTCs) and on the ATI's main page at [www.facebook.com/ATIinteractive](http://www.facebook.com/ATIinteractive).

"RiceTalks" is an effort of the ATI network in joining the nationwide call to "Grow Local. Buy local. Eat local. #SupportOurRiceFarmers".

## Moving forward

Even today, in the middle of the "new normal", training and advisory services will still be on full speed given the different strategies that can be used to reach clients. The needs and preferences of the clientele remain the main consideration in using these strategies and maximizing the tools available.

The endgame of these efforts is to uplift the lives of farmers and improve the country's agriculture sector.

We are ready. Our platforms are ready. The question now is – are you?#



## Gawad Saka Recognizes Hard Work of Farmers, Fishers Amid Pandemic

Catheryn Villorente

DILIMAN, Quezon City—The Department of Agriculture (DA) recognized 13 individuals and nine organizations for their outstanding contributions in the country's agriculture and fisheries sector during the "49th Gawad Saka: Parangal sa Natatanging Magsasaka at Mangangisda" presented virtually, December 14.

Gawad Saka is an annual search led by the DA, together with its bureaus and attached agencies, that aims to pay tribute to the achievements of farmers and fishers in the country. This was first launched as the "Search for Outstanding Farmers of the Year" in 1970.

In its 49th year, Gawad Saka acknowledged the 22 awardees in a virtual event keynoted by Secretary William Dar. In his video message, Dar applauded the farmers and fishers for their efforts in ensuring food security in the country even during the pandemic.

"In the midst of the COVID-19 global pandemic, you remain steadfast in the forefront of the sector to bring affordable, safe, and nutritious food to the table of every Filipino. With your support and help, we will achieve a resilient and food-secure nation while increasing the productivity of income of farmers and fishers," he said.

He also thanked the awardees for their proactive efforts to pursue innovation and practical farming solution and assured them of the Department's support in the further development of the sector.

Additionally, Undersecretary for Operations and Gawad Saka Technical Committee

chairperson Ariel Cayanan commended every farmer and fisher in the country.

*"Sa panahon ng pandemiya, na gumupo sa ekonomiya ng ating bansa, ay muling pinatunayan ng ating mga magsasaka at mga mangangisda ang kahalagahan ng agrikultura sa pag-suporta ng ating ekonomiya,"* he said.

[In this time of a pandemic, which devastated our country's economy, our farmers and fishers once again proved the importance of agriculture in supporting the growth of our economy.]

Furthermore, he guaranteed that as long as there are dedicated and modernized farmers and fishers, Gawad Saka will continue to exist.

The Gawad Saka winners for the farming, livestock, and fishing sectors each received cash prize worth Php250,000, while Php350,000 were given to each of the winning institutions and organizations. Additionally, funding assistance for selected projects were part of the award for some individuals and organizations.

This year's virtual presentation of the Gawad Saka awards was spearheaded by the DA and the Agricultural Training Institute. It was streamed live through the DA's official Facebook Page.#



## 2019 Rice Achievers Awards Celebrate Lifelong Service of Industry Champions

Jenny Rose Gabao

DILIMAN, Quezon City—The Department of Agriculture (DA), through its bureaus and attached agencies, capped off this year's National Rice Awareness Month (NRAM) with the conduct of the 2019 Rice Achievers Awards (RAA) ceremonies.

Durog Irrigators Association from Miag-ao, Iloilo is one of the recipients for the Most Outstanding Small Water Irrigation Systems Association (SWISA) award. Members of the organization, led by their president Fe Rem Ninofranco, expressed their gratitude in a pre-recorded video message.

"I encourage my fellow farmers to give their best and love for farming. They should not wait for the government's assistance. Rather, [they should] tell the government what they need to improve their well-being," Ninofranco said.

She also stressed the importance in involving the youth in agriculture for continuous growth in the sector and for the future of next generation. "I encourage many of you to still engage in farming despite the pandemic and the many issues in agriculture. After all, there is money in farming," she explained.

Aside from the SWISA category, outstanding irrigators associations (IAs) and provinces were also recognized in the activity. Meanwhile, outstanding municipalities and agricultural extension workers will receive their awards in separate ceremonies to be held locally.

The winning IAs and SWISAs received Php1 million each, while the provinces received Php4 million, both through grants. These will

be used to further improve the rice industry in their respective areas.

Aside from the awarded farmers and groups, pioneers of the agriculture sector were also recognized during the event for their efforts and unique contribution to the field. Senator Cynthia Villar was recognized as a "Champion of Philippine Agriculture"; Monetary Board Member V. Bruce Tolentino received the "Lifetime Contributor Award"; former Philippine Rice Research Institute director Santiago Obien was given the "Legacy Award"; and, DA Assistant Secretary for Operations Andrew Villacorta accepted the "Service Excellence Award".

Marking his last day in government service after 41 years, Villacorta expressed his optimism to achieve rice self-sufficiency of the country. Through the leadership of Agriculture Secretary William Dar, he looked forward to achieving this goal by 2022 in cooperation with rice farmers, local government units, farmers' associations, and stakeholders.

Before the event concluded, Agricultural Training Institute Assistant Director Rosana Mula again congratulated the winners and appeal to them to help the DA in improving the lives of the farmers. "The Rice Achievers show that when it comes to agriculture, impossible is nothing. With your persistence and hard work, our dream of having a food-secure Philippines with prosperous farmers really can be realized. As exemplary farmers, we hope that you will share your learning and experiences to those who aspire to be at your position. Let us be one in pursuing inclusive and sustainable development in the agriculture sector," Mula said.#



# Faith in Ph Agriculture

Jenny Rose Gabao

As early as January in 2020, the country faced some of the most trying challenges including the Taal volcanic eruption, outbreak of infectious animal diseases, crop pest infestation, series of typhoons, and the COVID-19 pandemic that continues to threaten all aspects of livelihood. These phenomena have shaped 2020 into one historic year.

Despite all these drawbacks, the Filipino people remain resilient as ever. Yet, to ensure the continuous survival and growth of the country, in every aspect possible, various private- and government-led efforts are kept in motion. With the agriculture sector considered to be the backbone of the economy, realizing a sustainable future for farmers, fishers, and other stakeholders is still at the forefront of the Department of Agriculture's (DA) thrusts.

## Support for rice industry stakeholders

Marking the second year since its enactment, the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (RCEF) under the Rice Tariffication Law continues to reach as many farmers and agricultural workers, utilizing different strategies to cope with the limitations brought about by the pandemic.

For the extension component, the Agricultural Training Institute's (ATI) Regional Training Centers (RTCs) maximized the use of available resources to reach its clientele at large. The training of trainers (TOT), which was put on hold early in 2020, pushed through after months of re-strategizing the conduct of activities under the new normal.

By implementing the blended-learning approach, the TOTs were successfully completed by dedicated agricultural extension workers (AEWs) through lectures on various rice-related topics, complemented by hands-on activities on the use of rice farming machineries for an attainable higher yield.

"The TOT is a manifestation of everyone's passion and willingness to provide more development opportunities for our farmers and fishers in the region, no matter what situation we might be in," ATI Director Alfredo Aton said.





Over 4,000 individuals were trained under the TOT for the year. These trainees were equipped with the knowledge and skills suitable to train rice farmers in the near future. Meanwhile, school-on-the-air (SOA) programs, technical briefings, information caravans, information education and communication (IEC) strategies, and other training activities were also successfully undertaken with health and safety protocols in place.

None of these would be successful if not for the joint efforts and collaboration with the ATI-RTCs, Philippine Rice Research Institute (PhilRice), Philippine Center for Postharvest Development and Mechanization (PHilMech), Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA), other institutions and agencies, local government units, and farmers and fishers alike.

By the end of the third quarter of 2020, over 18,000 farmers were trained through the RCEF-Farmers' Field School. The numbers are set to increase as operational Farm Schools nationwide are targeted to grow to more than 500 across the country.

## *Communicating for agriculture*

To achieve such objective, communication strategies play a big role to disseminate valuable information to farmers tilling the land and to fishers selflessly working hand-in-hand to provide every household with safe, secure, and affordable food.

In September, four pilot barangays in Koronadal City were validated to serve as Farmers' Information and Technology Services (FITS) Kiosks under RCEF. Through these barangay FITS Kiosks, information on rice production and other related technologies is made available and more accessible to the end users.

Various IEC materials on rice production and other agriculture and fishery technologies were provided to the FITS Kiosks, as well as equipment, display rack, tables, and chairs to establish not just availability of information, but also comfort and ease of access. The FITS Center of Koronadal City was also provided with ICT tools essential for the dissemination of information efforts.

By the end of 2020, the establishment of around 100 FITS Kiosks was facilitated in different barangays across the country, including the provinces of Ifugao, Isabela, Cagayan, Nueva Ecija, Laguna, Occidental Mindoro, Camarines Sur, Bohol, Leyte, Biliran, Zamboanga del Sur, Misamis Occidental, and Agusan del Sur.

## *Charging ahead*

For 2021, more programs and activities are set to continuously extend information, training, and advisory services for the prosperity of the sector. With the challenges in the implementation of the programs for 2020, the year ahead opens another opportunity to improve and re-charge the delivery of services to come to par with the hard work of farmers and fishers in attaining self-sufficiency and food security.

"Now, more than ever, our farmers need RCEF and similar support to help them bounce back. We acknowledge the pressing need of our farmers, so we continue to implement our programs for them," Agriculture Secretary William Dar said.

With the resilient Filipino spirit, the tillers of the land have long proven that no typhoon is strong enough to break the cycle of food production. Even with the pandemic, the unwavering service of local farmers and fishers continues to uplift the agriculture sector and shows that anything is possible as long as everyone joins hands towards one common goal. #

## Embracing new normal on extension delivery

Merrian Piquero Soliva

As I write this blog, I am already at my office desk. The work-from-home scheme was already up since our province is no longer on enhanced community quarantine; rather, it's on general community quarantine (GCQ) beginning May 1, 2020 where agriculture, fisheries, and forestry sectors may resume full operations.

However, being in GCQ means that the movement of people is largely limited to "accessing necessities and work" while uniformed personnel and quarantine officers are present at border checkpoints.

With this, our planned activities from the last week of March until now are affected, thus, strategies were generated to run our services in the region.

As part of the Agricultural Training Institute's (ATI) network of training centers, we share similar challenges in the implementation of our programs, thus, the only solution that we found fitting is to maximize the use of social media.

Social media is defined by lifewire dot com as web-based communication tools that enable people to interact with each other by sharing and consuming information.

Of course, for techie-inclined persons like the millennials or from generation Y, this social media platform is as easy as peeling a banana, but for generation X like me, probably, it's a struggle, or shall I say, some sort of a challenge so to speak.

When I think of this scenario, I can remember Obing, of ATI-10 and Hazel, of ATI-8, retorted my claim once that "I feel like I am ancient," especially if I don't have any first-hand idea on new trends presented when we have gatherings summoned by the Information Services Division headed by Ms. Niet Arceo.

Here, generations X and Y are easily classified because we are like magnets in terms of informal groupings. But what makes these two generations unique, once convened in one work area, is that the chemistry is understood and can generate positive outcomes.

This blog is sincerely dedicated to both generations for making our webinars and social media cards on tips and technology guides, plus other exciting online trivia and contests that generated a variety of positive comments and lauded by online learners and advocates as the best medium to reach them out.

These activities give me so many lessons in life that I can sum up into three important points: One, despite the pandemic, information technology bridges the gap where people are now embracing the new normal and they are ready to implement what they have learned.

Two, both generations are a perfect mix because they played a great role in materializing the concept of reaching a wide variety of learners in the comforts of their home. Generation X is responsible for the content while generation Y provides the aesthetic side that makes the output respond to the signs of time.

Third, the openness of one's heart and mind to embrace and accept good practices from both generations, plus the positive responses of the virtual participants, despite this crisis, make our services up and running and continue to touch lives.

To my ATI Family across the network, my grand salute to all of us who never cease to innovate just to put our clients' needs, as one of our top priorities. Our prayers that this crossroads will be akin to world healing. #





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