

Issue 291

GREENFIELDS

THE LONGEST-RUNNING PHILIPPINE AGRICULTURAL MAGAZINE

BOHOL'S CHOCOLATE PRINCESS

ON GROWING A KINGDOM



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*Hall of Fame Awardee
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1985, 2002, 2006, 2010*

MESSAGE FROM THE PUBLISHER

I **T WAS IN THE EARLY 90'S** that I experienced my first provincial assignment from my previous employment. It was to be in the Central Visayas region of Cebu and Bohol. I cried for two reasons: first, my wife just delivered our third child and my first boy, so I wanted to enjoy fatherhood, and secondly, the fear of the unknown. Cebu and Bohol had been branded as a death trap by all the salesmen I had conversed with, and was a place that resulted in many resignations due to its unique market and regionalist character.

But I had been misinformed. I found that my three years in Central Visayas were some of the best years of my life.

Cebu, the Queen city of the south, is the oldest city and where I'd been based. 80% of my time was allotted to Cebu. However, I also always looked forward to Thursdays, as it meant my scheduled departure to Bohol.

True to its name, Bohol is "God's Little Paradise" because of its mysterious and charming locations. Home to the magnificent Chocolate Hills, Bohol is also known for its unpolluted waters and white sand beaches. But in this Greenfields edition, we will be focusing more on the agricultural contribution of Bohol, as well as the men and women leading the Agricultural revolution. Considered as the food granary of the Central Visayas region, its agricultural area is estimated at 66% with rice, corn, and ubi as the major crops.

However, there's a new commodity brewing and painting a new identity against Bohol's already rich agricultural mural. Each page in this issue will take you on a journey that will explore that, as well as other amazing things that perhaps you may not have known that Bohol has to offer. Our hope is that through reading, you'll feel as if you've been able to travel there yourself, despite being wherever you are currently.

So please enjoy reading, and savor the chocolatey taste of Bohol.

SalaMAT po!



What the Experts Say

DR. WILLIAM D. DAR

THE 2021 FOOD SECURITY SUMMIT (FSS) organized by the Department of Agriculture (DA) in mid-May also became the venue for experts to share their views on food security and leveling up the country's agriculture sector. These experts were invited to find stakeholders and actors from the country's agri-food sector to gain insight on its challenges and how to deal with them.

While the FSS was held virtually, there were venues where participants physically converged but strictly observed health protocols. At least 6,000 participated in the event.

Let me start with the views given by Dr. V. Bruce J. Tolentino, who is the current Monetary Board member of the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP), former DA Undersecretary for Policy and Planning, and Deputy Director-General of the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI).

Dr. Tolentino strongly believes in extending more credit and support to stakeholders in the agriculture sector, which is no surprise considering his membership in the BSP Monetary Board. "In the short term, it is appropriate to organize programs and activities that provide support to farmers and fishers as the reform process takes place," he shared.

From the government, the Agricultural Credit and Policy Council (ACPC) and the Land Bank of the Philippines have responded to the call of providing credit for agricultural stakeholders. However, I also wish that the private sector would participate more actively in this.

Former Socioeconomic Planning Secretary Cielito F. Habito said the DA is moving in the right direction but added that the development of the country's agriculture sector cannot be left solely to the agency. May I add that it is the job of the department to steer the agriculture sector in the right direction while local government units must do the "rowing," or the work on the ground. This translates to collective action.

Habito also believes that this collective action should involve "farmers, bureaucrats, scientists, non-government workers, large and small entrepreneurs, bankers and financiers, traders, logistics providers and workers, as well as the general consumers" who all have "valuable roles to play."

However, he lamented over the Philippines' seventh ranking in Southeast Asia in food security. Our country earned a score of 73, besting only Cambodia and Laos based on the 2020 The Economist Global Food Security Index.

The concept of food security, explained Habito, involves a combination of food availability, affordability, quality and safety, and resilience against risks. "A nation can be food self-sufficient yet food insecure, and can be food-secure even if not food self-sufficient," he added.

EXPORT MARKET AND COMPETITIVENESS

For his part, Ramon L. Clarete, Dean of the University of the Philippines School of Economics, said the Philippines can increase its participation in the global food trade, pointing out that the country lost the opportunity to earn \$249.7 million more in export earnings, of which \$148 million came from the US market. Clarete added that it is high time the Philippine expanded its trade ties for agri-food products with countries like Canada, the Netherlands, China, and Hong Kong.

Now, let us go to Rolando T. Dy, Executive Director of the University of Asia and the Pacific's Center for Food and Agri-Business for his overview of Philippine agricultural trade.

He shared that in 2019, Philippine agriculture imports were twice as much as the exports (\$14.5 billion versus \$6.7 billion), but this trend could be reversed. Rice and coffee have the potential for yield improvements, and that can be attained through farm consolidation and private sector engagement, among others.

Also, top agri-exports like Cavendish banana, pineapple and its products, and coconut products could be increased by measures like leasing more land and contract-growing arrangements. The other measures Dy recommended to increase agri-exports were supply chain organization and provision of equity and financing.

On the other hand, Director General Dr. Qu Dongyu of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations gave his keynote address during the FSS. Here, he proposed an FAO strategic framework for the next decade that seeks to support the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. This framework will jumpstart the transformation leading to more efficient, inclusive, resilient, and sustainable agri-food systems for better production, nutrition, environment, and life – ensuring no one gets left behind.

"Transformed agri-food systems will play a key role in addressing the global challenges of malnutrition, poverty, and hunger," Dr. Dongyu said. "To get to where we need to be by 2030, we urgently need to do things differently and act holistically. We need to rely on data and science, foster partnerships, and push for innovation. FAO provides knowledge and analysis to support its members in making evidence-based decisions," he added.

The FAO also continues to collaborate with agriculture entities and stakeholders in the Philippines to transform the agri-food systems, aiming to make agriculture an engine for economic growth. Dr. Dongyu even expressed support for the "New Thinking" to transform Philippine agriculture.

I would like to thank Messrs. Tolentino, Habito, Clarete, Dy and Dongyu for sharing their valuable views on how the Philippines can attain and sustain food security amid these challenging times.

Definitely, the country's agriculture sector needs views from real experts to move forward. And move forward we will!

Despite challenges, PH posts record palay harvest

DESPITE THE STRONG TYPHOONS that hit the country in the latter part of 2020, the Philippines set a new record for palay (unmilled rice) production for the three months of this year, proving that the various interventions by the Department of Agriculture (DA) can yield excellent results.

“We are pleased to report that the country’s rice farmers harvested a total of 4.626 million metric tons (MMT) for the first quarter of 2021, 8.6-percent more than in 2020 Q1 (first quarter), and erasing the record harvest in 2018 Q1,” said Agriculture Secretary William Dar.

“This record first-quarter yield further boosts our confidence to hit, or even surpass, the 20.4-million metric ton palay production target we set this year, barring strong typhoons and other natural calamities,” he added.

The previous first-quarter palay harvest record was set in 2018.

With the first-quarter palay harvest record, the DA is eyeing another bumper harvest from the next rice planting season, which will make it possible for the country to set a new annual palay harvest record.

“This record first-quarter yield further boosts our confidence to hit, or even surpass, the 20.4-million metric ton palay production target we set this year, barring strong typhoons and other natural calamities,” Secretary Dar said.

“We, therefore, commend millions of our rice

farmers, and thousands of local government technicians and leaders, and industry stakeholders nationwide for this achievement. We also appreciate the efforts of our ‘OneDA’ team for vigorously implementing the various interventions that led to the improvements in yield,” he added.

INCREASE IN AREA PLANTED AND YIELD

One of the reasons for the record palay harvest in the first quarter of this year is the increase in the area planted, which, according to the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) was 4.55-percent higher at 1.098 million hectares compared to the same period last year.

This shows that the doomsday prediction of those critical of Republic Act 11203 or the Rice Tariffication Law (RTL) did not come true, or that millions of farmers will no longer cultivate rice because of the influx of cheaper imports. And amid the pandemic, there were attempts by some interest groups to show that thousands of farmers were losing interest in cultivating rice.

“This only shows that our palay farmers are

Agriculture Sec. William D. Dar in one of his many visits in the various rice farms in the country. Extending the assistance and services of the Department to our farmers.



“
This record first-quarter yield further boosts our confidence to hit, or even surpass, the 20.4-million metric ton palay production target we set this year, barring strong typhoons and other natural calamities

**AGRICULTURE
SECRETARY
WILLIAM DAR**

confident to continue planting rice, contrary to what detractors were peddling at the start of the implementation of the changes in the country's rice policy,” Secretary Dar said.

For his part, Director John de Leon of the DA's Philippine Rice Research Institute (PhilRice) said the production growth was also from the improvement in yield aside from an increase in area cultivated. He said that each hectare's yield grew by 3.87 percent over the same three-month period last year.

“Yield went up from 3.88 metric tons per hectare (MT/ha) to 4.03 MT/ha. Overall, area harvested contributed 54 percent to the incremental first quarter production, while the share of yield was 46 percent,” de Leon said in his report to Secretary Dar.

The PhilRice director also said that palay output was recorded in both irrigated and rainfed areas.

De Leon said the growth in area harvested could be attributed to the above-normal rainfall caused by the series of typhoons in the last quarter of 2020, enabling farmers to do quick turn-around planting.

Secretary Dar said they expect a more stable market for rice this year, despite the

challenges from the Covid-19 pandemic as the various programs and projects funded by the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (RCEF) are set in place. Complemented by the DA banner national inbred and hybrid rice program and the Rice Resiliency Project (RRP), these projects are expected to impact palay production nationwide.

RA 11203 funnels at least P10 billion annually to RCEF for the following components: P5 billion for the distribution of farm machines; P3 billion for the propagation and distribution of high-yielding seeds; P1 billion for credit support; and P1 billion for training. The RCEF programs run from 2019 to 2024.

Aside from that, RRP subsidized the fertilizers of rice farmers from the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic from the second quarter of last year. The RRP is part of the DA's Plant, Plant, Plant Program.

“We are slowly achieving a favorable equilibrium, wherein consumers have access to affordable rice while our farmers reap bountiful harvests and earn bigger incomes as a result of yield improvements and stable prices of palay,” Secretary Dar said.

Bohol's Chocolate Princess On Growing A Kingdom

BY MIKAELA GABRIELLE E. FERNANDEZ



“ONE DAY, I’LL MAKE BOHOL

really the island of the Chocolate Hills,” Dalareich told the judges during her pitch at the first Young Women Entrepreneur Bootcamp (YWEB) in September 2013, as she declared her vision for Bohol and their family’s tableya. The YWEB was organized by the Samahan ng mga Pilipina para sa Reporma at Kaunlaran (Spark!) and the United States Embassy for thirty young women all over the Philippines pitching their businesses.

Dalareich with her parents and Agriculture Secretary William Dar.

Dalareich behind-the-scenes look at how the tableya chocolates are made.

Dalareich planting cacao trees to encourage the industry.

How far can dreams and a basketful of chocolate take you? For Dalareich, it took her to Belgium, Japan, London, among others.

Dalareich, or simply Dal, won the Young Women Entrepreneurs Bootcamp, taking home USD 5,000, which she then used to further expand their business (Dalareich Food Products), as well as to buy a car for the delivery of their products.

Dal’s success only snowballed from there. She faced victory after victory in almost all ventures that she delved into, all the while staying humble and true to her roots.

Dalareich Food Products began in 1994 as a small family business owned by the Polot

Family. Their main product is the *tableya*, a 100% unsweetened chocolate product. It was a means for Dal’s mom to provide additional income for their family while her dad drove the tricycle.

“Basically, it’s just like a woman who helped her husband to feed the family and send us to school,” Dal recalls her early family life.

Dal graduated with a degree in Computer Engineering at the Bohol Island State University, but she had a genuine passion for chocolate-making and aspired to further elevate their family business.

After the competition, Dal had a chance to get a scholarship in Belgium to study from the world’s best chocolatiers at Ghent University.



How Dal got the scholarship, she attributes to God's goodness and sheer serendipity.

"How I got it — one of the competitors on that contest tagged me on Facebook about an opportunity in that university. *Sabi niya*, 'Dal, I remember what you teach, and I think this is your chance to also expand your learnings about chocolate, especially since we don't have that University here in the Philippines.' When I read that, *sabi ko*, 'Mama, I'll go to Belgium. This is really for me,'" shared Dal.

And indeed it was. Dal was the sole person from the Philippines who was accepted for the scholarship.

While on scholarship, Dal learned about the making and science of chocolates. When she got back to the Philippines, she was eager to share her knowledge and innovate their *tableya* by making it finer, complete with a melt-in-your-mouth experience.

After some time, Dal also started Ginto Chocolates, a social enterprise connected with Dalareich food products to help farmers in the

Bohol islands by educating them on the value of the cacao trees planted in their backyards. Through this, Dal taps local backyard farmers, from whom she sources cacao beans to produce artisan chocolates.

"So I started going to the communities and I said 'Let's help each other,' so I did my lectures about post-harvest processes and fermentation processes."

She added, "We're not actually like Davao, which has bigger farms... We only have backyard farmers, so putting up communities, helping them do capacity building and all. It's not an easy journey that I started before, especially like, you go to communities, the grassroots. The way I think is not the way they think."

Dal encountered several challenges throughout her journey before she became the established chocolatier that she is today, but her passion for chocolate-making served as her motivation in moving forward. This passion and determination eventually helped her gain several recognitions and accolades, both local and abroad.

"So I started going to the communities and I said 'Let's help each other,' so I did my lectures about post-harvest processes and fermentation processes."

DALAREICH POLOT

Dalareich



In 2016, Dal was invited by the U.S. government for an all-expense paid study tour in Washington D.C. for a whole month.

“*Surprise din sa’kin ‘yon ni Lord. ‘Di ko alam bakit nila ako napili* but I just got a letter from Washington D.C. that you’re selected in the program. *Sabi ko, scam ba ‘to?* But the US Embassy [said] ‘Dal, this is actually a very unique program. We didn’t know how you were able to get in but this is not by application. This is by invitation. But don’t worry, this is not a scam.’”

So, Dal went on a study trip to Washington DC, then New York, California, Burlington, and lastly, Hawaii, along with four other women entrepreneurs from the Philippines with the theme, “fostering women entrepreneurship for the Philippines to the United States.”

In 2019, Dalareich Food Products won a Gold award in London’s Academy of Chocolate, the first time the Philippines ever received the gold award.

“That’s the first time we joined a competition

abroad. People always ask me, ‘Why don’t you join international competitions? It’s good for your business.’ And I said, ‘This is also a claim. One day.’ I need to make sure. First-time ko *magjoin*, gold *na diretso*.”

Dal recalls her experiences when they found out that they won. “I want to honor my mom, who started the *tableya*, *sa kanya naman talağa ‘yon. Siya yung nagsimula n’un* but *hindi lang na-recognize. Sabi ko kay mama*, ‘Imagine the *tableya* that you were making to send us to college. You were able to send us to college because of that product, and it was recognized all over the world now as a gold awardee.”

To receive the award, Dal, together with her parents, flew to London. It was also the first time Dal’s parents ever went abroad.

“It was also a life-changing journey for me to bring my parents [abroad].”

Dal regularly went to chocolate factories to view the advanced chocolate-making machinery whenever she was abroad. She hoped to someday purchase some for their own

Dalareich with her parents receiving the Gold Award from the Academy of Chocolate.

Dalareich helping to plant cacao trees.

A behind-the-scenes look at how the *tableya* chocolates are made.



factory in Bohol.

"I want Bohol to see how the chocolates were made. It's like when you go... it's like Willy Wonka! But we need to buy machines."

When Dal and her parents went to London, she finally convinced her parents to buy the machines and elevate their business. They ordered the machines in 2019, and they arrived in January 2020, which helped them better manage the reduced workforce brought by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Aside from the gold award in London, last 2019, Dal also won the APEC 2019 Business Efficiency and Success Target (BEST) Award under the family business support category, held in Chile.

Dal was unable to travel to Chile to conduct the pitch in person, so she did it via Skype — the only person to do so in the competition. Despite this, Dal was still chosen as one of the winners.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, Dal encountered logistical constraints with

Philippine couriers due to the strict regulations and limited movement. Fortunately, she found it easier to ship the supply abroad due to the systematic delivery of international couriers. Due to the high number of available stocks, Dal then posted on Facebook that Dalareich Food Products was now delivering all over the world. This allowed her to make deliveries to Japan, Singapore, and Melbourne.

Recalling the many blessings that she encountered throughout her life and how a series of seemingly random yet interconnected opportunities brought about her current success, Dal would exclaim, "It's providential."

As a piece of advice to fellow dreamers, Dal shared, "I think you just need to follow whatever is in your heart, and I think God will really bring you to the path that you should be on. Always believe that there's guidance, and it's really God's will — whatever happens, and whatever challenges also. Especially if you know you already know your purpose, you always go back to your why."



More of Dalareich working on tableya.

Dalareich on the set of The Bottomline with Mimi Boy Abunda for an interview.

Dalareich and her parents with Bohol Governor Arthur Yap at their store.



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A Cup of Golden Chocolate from Mom

— TAKES ON THE WORLD —

BY ANGELAH POLOT

(How a humble street sweeper swept off adversity, shifted to a tableya making business, and earned a gold award in the prestigious International Academy of Chocolate Awards in London.)

THEY SAY THAT BEAUTIFUL STORIES are those written with extraordinary words and only by the finest individuals who have mastered the skill of intertwining letters into words, words into phrases, and phrases into sentences. But it is true – some beautiful stories are those that come from people who have lived in a world not so gracious to them. These are people who have been through so much and who have been wounded the most, and yet still find a reason to rise above it all, refusing to be swept by the storms. This brings us to a story of overcoming adversity. This story is for my parents, most especially my mother: a woman with a heart the size of the world.





LOOKING BACK

It may come as a surprise that, as a young girl, Elsa Polot had already encountered the utmost hurdle. At an early age, she experienced life's bitterness and even dreamt of being adopted by a wealthy family. She seemed like a sown cacao seed lacking water, air, and warmth, yet continues to fight to sprout and survive.

"I did not know that I would be able to raise and provide for my five children because I was only a Grade 6 graduate. My father was just a coconut farmer who used to gather coconut wine that could be made into vinegar, and my mother was a *tableya* (unsweetened chocolate) maker. When I was young and started going to elementary school, I only had one pencil for the entire year that I used to sharpen both ends. I also had only one pair of slippers for a year. I used to walk barefoot going to school, so my slippers would last for a year.

I did not experience having nice clothes. Since I am the youngest in our family, I had clothes formerly belonging to sisters. My life was difficult back then, but God has been my only guide. I did not want my children now to be in the same position that I was in before. So I worked hard," she said in Bisaya.

Elsa has gone through countless misfortunes, but despite battling the Goliaths of life, she continues to focus on her dreams. She worked hard for the things she wanted and helped her family, too. She said that she often helped her mother make *tableya* and sell them together with *bulinaw* (anchovies) to the locals. At age 16, she worked in a food factory near their place.

SWEEPING THE WEEDS OF LIFE

She thought she would have a much better life after her marriage, but even that was not as easy as she thought it would be. Her husband, Ricardo, also learned how to cope with the difficulties of life at a very young age, just like her. He worked as a tricycle driver to sustain the family while she was at home, looking after their children. They used to live in a makeshift house and worked hand in hand to support their family. And yet, she said that some people still treat them as inferior, often

degrading them because of their social status and lack of money. But they didn't mind them; instead, they treated those words as a challenge to focus on their goal as a couple, which was to sustain and give their children the future they always dreamed of having.

Elsa shared that she tried to venture into numerous start-ups, such as sari-sari stores and selling fish and daily meals, but these were not sustainable. She then remembered the *tableya* business that her *Nanay* (mother) Tomasa used to make before. That's when she started roasting cacao seeds and continued *Nanay's* morning errands for her loyal customers, who couldn't seem to complete breakfast without a cup of *sikwate* (hot chocolate). However, despite Elsa's perseverance, their income

as a couple was still not enough to raise a growing family of five and finance the children's education.

She then decided to work as a street sweeper in the city of Tagbilaran. She swept the eerie streets of the city hours before the light of dawn came so that she and her husband, who worked as a tricycle driver and in a furniture shop, could make ends meet.

"I applied as a street sweeper for four years so I could send my children to school. Even if it was with a heavy heart, I just prayed to God. There was one time I was assigned near the school campus where my daughter was attending. My heart trembled because I was afraid that my daughter might be bullied if her friends knew that her mother was a street sweeper. But it so happened that she approached me and called, 'Ma.' I endured that moment even though I was touched and nearly cried because I just ignored her. I turned a blind eye and walked ahead with my broom and dustpan. I felt sad, but I experienced how it felt to be bullied when I was younger, and I didn't want it to happen to my children.

Even while working as a street sweeper, I felt how God made me happy. There were times when there were those who approached me in the streets just to hand me money or food. I didn't know how I looked at that time; sometimes I wonder if I looked like a beggar. Why would they give me money out of nowhere? Some also credited and appreciated my hard work on the street."

THRIVING TABLEYA BUSINESS

Selling the locally crafted *tableya* was the only way Elsa earned extra income then. At dawn, she worked as a street cleaner. By the time it was morning after her duty, she would go straight home and start to roast cacao beans and handcraft *tableya*. They would then deliver the product to numerous sari-sari stores, and this would be enough to survive the day.

Like the journey of the Andalusian shepherd boy, Santiago, in the novel of Paolo Coelho, Mama Elsa's journey also reflected how "sometimes you have to go around the world to understand that the treasure is in your own home." After four years of working as a street sweeper, she diverted all her energies to focus on the *tableya* business because there were no other means to make a living. That's when a home-based *tableya* product, Dalareich *Tableya*, was born and

Elsa says: "My life was difficult back then, but God has been my only guide. I did not want my children now to be in the same position that I was in before. So I worked hard."



named after her second daughter.

The humble beginnings of Dalareich Food Products started in 1994 with only five kilos of cacao. Later on in her life, after numerous rejections and persistence, Elsa was able to supply the product for a local supermarket. She recalled how she struggled at first to supply a local store. She had brought five packs of tableya with her but it was rejected because it did not seem to be what they wanted. It saddened her, but she still returned to that same store and was rejected a second time. During her third comeback, she prayed and asked God: if the tableya that she wanted to supply would still be rejected, then it would be the last time she would pursue it. But it seemed that her prayers were answered because when she came back for the third time, they accepted and entertained her, asking for a delivery of fifty packs of the product. Little did they know, this would be the turning point that would alter their fates.

HARD WORK PAYS OFF

With the right amount of determination, hard work, prayers, and perseverance, everything gradually paid off. The tableya product flourished into a family enterprise and was supplied in more than a few local shopping malls, deluxe hotels, airport shops, and through direct website purchases. Because of this business, Elsa and her husband were able to provide for their needs and sustained the family.

After the second daughter, Dalareich, graduated college in 2009, she ventured further into the chocolate industry. In 2014, she had the opportunity to learn how to make bean-to-bar chocolate through a scholarship in Belgium, where she studied cacao and chocolate processing at Ghent University. On September 8, 2017, Dalareich Chocolate House became a reality. It's the first chocolate factory in Bohol that welcomes tourists and visitors who want to know more about the roots of Bohol's cacao history. It also includes a showroom where unsweetened chocolate based-products and bean-to-bar chocolates are displayed. Free hot chocolate is also served there for the guests.

"We opened Dalareich Chocolate House so we could expand our production since we only had a small one before. Many people would have wanted to visit, but our production was not something to be proud of because it was only very little. I am really happy that we have Dalareich Chocolate House," said Elsa, now the proprietor of Dalareich Food Products.

"I thank God a lot because it all happened and I didn't expect it. It's like it has been set and planned already by God. I was just an ordinary man with an ordinary life driving a tricycle and polishing furniture for a living. Who would have known this would happen? Everything that happened to us was just like a dream. It was indeed like a dream," Elsa's husband, Ricardo, added.

The business product also triumphed in its representation of Bohol and the Philippines in Salon du Chocolat, one of the world's largest chocolate shows in Paris, France. In 2019, it received its first international



Gold award in the prestigious International London-based Academy of Chocolate Awards. Among all the contestants, it was the unsweetened chocolate of Dalareich Food Products which received an award for the Drinking Chocolate category. It was their first time to join an international competition, and they were indeed so fortunate to bring home the gold for Bohol and the country's pride.

On October 2, 2019, Dalareich also won the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Business Efficiency and Success Target (APEC BEST) Awards under the Family Business Support Category. This was held during the Women and the Economy Forum in La Serena, Chile.

SAILING TO THE CHOCOLATE ISLAND

Now, the majestic province of Bohol is not only known for its wondrous cone-shaped hills. It is also home to the international, gold-award winning unsweetened chocolate, which thrives in the Polot's family business. Today, Dalareich Food Products continues to fulfill its mission, which is to produce world-class chocolates made from the highest quality locally sourced cacao. They accomplish this through education, innovation, and sustainable production, and their business continues to aim for its vision: to be the best chocolate maker that will put the Philippines (especially Bohol) on the world's chocolate map.

And just like that, the story of the Polot family opened like a box of chocolates. It all started as a quiet dream, but with great joy, their prayers were slowly answered and became a reality. Elsa and Ricardo's five children are now grown-ups, each of them having graduated with a bachelor's degree, with some pursuing further studies.

Many adversities have come and gone for Mama Elsa, but she believed it was God who sustained her and her family. For her, prayers indeed moved mountains, so never lose hope. Dream big, because God is bigger. And when asked what life lesson she has continued to keep dearly, she answered, "Pray hard and work hard. As long as you are living the right way, God is always right behind you."



Elsa's proudest achievement: her successful and healthy family.

Taking Care of God's Little Paradise by Promoting Responsible Tourism

BY LEAN TAMARES



THE PHILIPPINES IS GIFTED with plenty of scenic places and natural resources, which is why many tourists continue to come to our country to enjoy its tropical climate, taste its colorful cuisine, and explore its many natural wonders. One of the many popular tourist destinations in the country is Bohol.

Dubbed as “God’s Little Paradise,” Bohol is famous for its Chocolate Hills and the iconic tarsier. It also boasts various historical structures and diving spots, attracting many to visit the province. However, while tourism boosts the country’s economy, irresponsible tourists still prove to be a problem. Fortunately for Bohol Beach Club, one of the country’s green resorts, this is not the case.

LEADING A GREEN MOVEMENT

Located on the island of Panglao, Bohol Beach Club has been recognized as part of the ASEAN Green Hotel loop in 2018. This means that the resort forwards sustainable tourism and employs environmentally friendly practices, which the resort coined as a “green initiative.”

As part of this initiative, they built a small farm in the resort.

“Now, we grow our lettuce, we grow some of our herbs and a lot of our vegetables in the resort,” the general manager, Allan Santos, shared. He has been with the company for more than 20 years and saw its transition to becoming a green resort. According to him, all their vegetables are organic.

Given the farming initiative’s success, they have since used and served these crops at the hotel’s restaurant. At least 70% of the lettuce used in their dishes comes from the farm, while the rest comes from the local market.

Aside from the farm, the resort also takes pride in using sustainable sources of energy and practicing responsible waste management. They harvest energy from the sun to power most, if not all, of their systems. The resort also has a waste recovery facility as well as one of the latest sewage treatment plants on the island.

“As you can see, there is a big garden that we have here in the resort, and it actually costs a lot to maintain healthy plants,” Santos said. To maintain the garden, they started using recycled water for watering. “We’re very happy that we’re able to recycle the water and use it to nourish [the garden].”

SPREADING THE GREEN INITIATIVE

Aside from employing green practices in their operations, Bohol Beach Club also strives to educate guests about being responsible tourists.

Allan Santos, general manager of the Bohol Beach Club, supervises the operations of the resort’s green initiative.

Dubbed as “God’s Little Paradise,” Bohol boasts of many natural tourist attractions, including its magnificent white sand beaches.



“We actually have “green rooms” in the resort wherein we provide our guests with reusable water bottles with metal straws, and things like that,” Santos said. These green rooms are complete with amenities that are reusable and less harmful to the environment. “What we do is when they check in, we tell them that these are things that they can bring with them, these are things they can use.” According to him, guests can take their water bottles to the restaurant and refill them to take on tours or island-hopping trips.

“It’s something that will help educate the tourists to support the initiative of the resort for being green.”

HELPING THE COMMUNITY

Aside from employing eco-friendly practices, the resort also plays an important role in helping the community progress.

“It is valuable for us to give importance to the people that live around us and the place where we live,” Santos said. The resort served as one of the sources of local employment, with 60% of Bohol Beach Club’s staff coming from Panglao Island.

Additionally, the resort serves as an avenue for locals to have their products recognized. For instance, chocolates are sourced from Dalareich Chocolate House, and carabao cheese from

another town in Bohol. Another collaboration currently in progress is with Buenaventura farms, which is set to become one of the resort restaurant’s local suppliers.

Although they work and partner with some well-known agribusinesses in the province, the resort still continues to support small business owners, including those living near the resort. “We don’t only support the big players but also the small players because this is, I think, the most important factor that we can do to help out the community,” Santos said.

According to him, many locals create products or have their own small businesses. Some of their neighbors bake puto, bibingka, and other kakanin. To support them, Bohol Beach Club buys their goods and serves them in their restaurant.

“We tell the guests specifically that these products are not baked in the resort but came from our neighbors,” Santos said. Clients who love the products and appreciate the fact that they were made by the locals are then connected to these small businesses directly.

From breathtaking views to delicious delicacies of Panglao island, there really is a lot to explore and try at Bohol Beach Club. Santos encourages locals to travel to the province and discover its beauty.

“At this point in time, we have to help ourselves. We will rise from this.”

Bohol Beach Club was awarded the ASEAN Green Hotel Standard and Philippine Sustainable Tourism Certification for their work in promoting responsible tourism in the country.

The resort grows organic lettuce in a small farm and serve them in their restaurant.

Welce
**Cabudlan Farmer's
 Association**
 Ubay, Bohol

21st Ubi Festival In the New Normal...

THE UBIQUITOUS UBI, A STAPLE IN BOHOL

BY EILEEN FAY M. VILLEGAS

1 N EXTRACTED COCONUT MILK, or in mixed vegetables, in soup or broth, or simply in syrup – it is all where ubi may be found if one is to dine in the household of any Boholano.

“Dito, ang ubi, bino-boil namin ‘yan, isinasama namin sa mga kung ano-ano, ginagawang gulay, ginagata namin parang gabi, isinasama namin sa sabaw, isinasama namin sa mga merienda – painitan ang tawag namin doon, [...] purwedeng garwing pasta,” Governor of Bohol, Arthur C. Yap, proudly shared the province’s delight for the crop.

Despite growing almost everywhere, the ubi that most Filipinos know is in the form of a sweet and smooth jam, a popular bottled pasalubong that most tourists don’t fail to bring home when returning from Baguio City. While this is true, ubi, regarded as a staple and not just as a dessert concoction, is known probably only in Bohol, whose high respect for the crop is imprinted in the “Awit sa Bohol”, the official anthem of the province.

CELEBRATING THE CROP

“Ubi occupies a very special place sa history ng Bohol,” Governor Yap said, “since [Bohol is] very

craggy, limited ang rice production space, so many times in its history, ang bumubuhay sa tao pag panahon ng drought is ubi.”

Not only does Bohol take pride in their crystal white beaches and clear blue seas, as well as the famous Chocolate Hills being one of the Philippines’ top tourist destinations, the ubi varieties growing in the province are what its people wish to be sought after as well – ubi kinampay being the best out there and a native to the place.

Because of this, it’s only right to celebrate ubi with a festival conceived especially for the “savior crop”. The Ubi Festival is held yearly in Bohol, with the Ubi Cook Off as its major event. During the event, hotels and restaurants in the province compete by showcasing their amazing food creations, spotlighting ubi as the main ingredient.

Moreover, the festival is a way to “deliver the message that ubi grows very well here in Bohol because we are climatically suitable, the soil and geography is suitable,” Governor Yap said.

Some ubi being sold at the Cabudlan Farmer's Association.



ADDING VALUE TO UBI

As the crop grows widely in the province, and with Bohol being the largest producer in the country, allotting 500 to 600 hectares for its production, ube is definitely an economic treasure, especially when local farmers and entrepreneurs further unearth the crop's potential.

"Ang sinasabi nga namin sa mga farmers, provincial government *ang tutulong sa mga nurseries para maraming* planting materials, *at saka* good and healthy strong plants; *kayo* [farmers], focused *kayo sa* planting it properly *para malaki 'yong* yield, and then after that *pagtulungan natin yung* value-adding," Governor Yap said.

He also told their farmers the promising profit from processing ube: "Imagine, 90 pesos per kilo [ang raw ube], but when you desiccate it, you can start selling up to 500 pesos per kilo, *so bakit mo ibebenta nang* 90 pesos?"

Through desiccation or drying, ube may also be turned into powder to be used as additive or flavoring for various food products. Doing so

potentially increases the product's value, which in turn raises the ube value, and increases demand in both the local and international markets.

UBI FOR THE ECONOMY

During the previous Ubi Festival, the savior crop proved to be a symbol of Bohol's resilience as the event successfully thrived amid the pandemic.

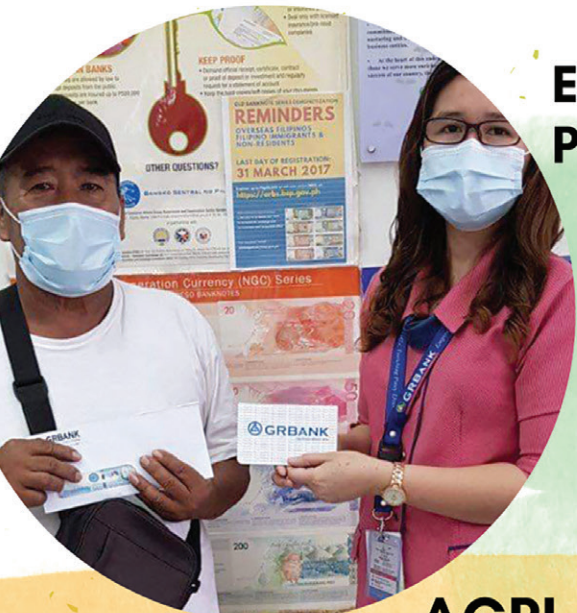
"In its first two weeks, naka-three and a half million *silá sa* sales," Governor Yap said, noting that the concessionaires would have generated even greater income had we been in the normal times, and tourists, other than the local people, were able to visit.

The festival is an effort by the province to recover from the losses caused by the pandemic to their ube industry. Governor Yap also mentioned "*hindi lang kasi dapat* plant lang nang plant, *'di ba*, we have to provide a market for it, that's the most critical." Thus, the event shall carry on with its goal to promote ube as a profitable commodity, especially including it as one of the prides of Bohol.

The different winning ube entries at the festival.

MAKING AFFORDABLE, ADEQUATE AND CONVENIENT CREDIT ACCESSIBLE TO SMALL FARMERS AND FISHERFOLK

The Agricultural Credit Policy Council (ACPC), an attached agency of the Department of Agriculture, is mandated to develop and advocate agri-credit policies and programs that promote farmers' and fisherfolk's access to sustained financial services.



EXPANDED SURE AID AND RECOVERY PROJECT (SURE COVID-19)

The SURE COVID-19 offers loan facilities for small farmers and fishers (SFF) and agri-fishery-based micro and small enterprises (MSEs) affected by the community quarantine due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Under the SFF facility, individual farmers/ fishers may avail of loans worth P25,000/household, with zero interest rate and no collateral, payable up to ten years. The MSE facility provides a working capital of up to P10 million per borrower with zero interest rate, and payable up to five years.

AGRI-NEGOSYO (ANYO)

The ANYO Loan Program offers loans to finance capital requirements for production, processing, marketing, acquisition of machinery or equipment, and construction of facility/ies. Eligible borrowers, who may be individuals, farmer and fisherfolk organizations/associations, and micro and small enterprises (MSEs) that are engaged in agriculture and fishery projects, may avail of up to P15million loan with zero-interest and payable up to five years.



KAPITAL ACCESS FOR YOUNG AGRIPRENEURS (KAYA)

The KAYA Loan Program offers loans to finance working capital and/or machineries and equipment acquisition requirements of start-up or existing agri-based projects of young entrepreneurs and agri-fishery graduates aged 18-30 years old. Each young agripreneurs may borrow up to P500,000 uncollateralized and zero-interest loans payable in five years.



For particular, write to:
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The Bellevue Resort Bohol:

A Truly Organic Experience

BY MIKAELA GABRIELLE E. FERNANDEZ



many people are developing the desire to shift to a purely organic lifestyle, but are intimidated to start. For one, it is challenging to get access to purely organic ingredients, and those who are able to often find that it comes with a hefty price tag.

While shifting to an organic lifestyle might seem daunting, the nutritional and health benefits gained by doing so may prove to be worth it.

In order to provide an even more luxurious stay for their guests, several hotels are elevating their dining experience by featuring an organic menu using ingredients sourced from their very own backyards. One such hotel is The Bellevue Resort on the island of Panglao in Bohol.

Located just 15 minutes away from the Bohol-Panglao International Airport, The Bellevue Resort rests on the quaint Doljo Beach's 250-meter white sand shoreline. Guests that stay in any of the 158 deluxe rooms and suites can wake up to a scenic beach view and the opportunity to experience the tranquil island life.

To heighten the experience further, The Bellevue Resort developed an organic gardening system so guests could have a taste of the finest and freshest culinary dishes.

"Mr. Johnny Chan, the owner of the resort, and I, we talk about promoting the organic plantation here in Bohol. So there's an idea to build up the greenhouse. With that one, we basically study on our own how to manage our own food," shared Engineer Manuel Gamonez of The Bellevue Resort.

The Bellevue Resort has all sorts of organic culinary plants like dale, parsley, celery, mint, and other herbs that are locally produced in their greenhouse to provide guests with an authentic farm-to-table dining experience.

Some people tend to be skeptical about the

A view of the rooms at the Bellevue Resort Bohol.



authenticity of establishments claiming to produce organic food, but Engineer Gamones assures the public that that is not the case for The Bellevue Resort. “There are so many things that you can have that you can enjoy in this place. So another question is, ‘How can you really say that it’s really organically grown, and how can you keep away the pests? For sure, you must use pesticides and harvesticide!’ No way. We don’t use that one. We basically create our own inoculants like EM effective microorganisms. We can actually assure that this is organically grown.”

He added, “Once you want to grow organic, it has to be [genuinely] organic. And one thing I can say if you plant organic food: all the minerals and materials will be there inside the plants... you are what you eat, because if it’s organically grown, [you consume] all the minerals and the nutrients. It will basically help your body build your immune system.”

Having an organic farm proved particularly advantageous for the hotel during the Covid-19 pandemic because it was able to support the food and beverage operations of the resort.

“We don’t need to order from other islands for vegetables because we grow them in the backyard; even our poultry needs are being supported by the farm,” shared Doer, the General Manager of the resort. He added, “Part of the initiative of having a sustainable resort is also giving life to the project of the community with the help of the provincial government and LGU of Panglao. Our local people from Lourdes and in Doljo are trained to do farming, so after training, they are deployed to the farm to produce very fresh vegetables from farm to the resort.”

Despite the challenges faced by the travel

industry due to the pandemic, The Bellevue Resort, Bohol was recently certified by the Department of Tourism as a recipient of the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) Safe Travels stamp. The WTTC Safe Travels stamp is the world’s first-ever global safety and hygiene stamp that allows travelers to recognize establishments around the world that have adopted globally standardized health and hygiene protocols. The stamp is a testimony to the resort’s adherence and commitment to global safety and hygiene protocols.

However, this is not the first time that the Bellevue Resort was recognized for its extraordinary efforts. It also won back-to-back as an ASEAN Green Hotel Standard Awardee due to its adoption of various green initiatives, such as waste segregation and coastal clean-up.

“For our trash bins, we are using used newspaper, and we are almost 90% plastic-free. One of the activities of the resort that we’ve been doing is that we’ve been consistently participating in the International Coastal Clean-Up with the coordination of the provincial government and LGU of Panglao, and also plastic-free Bohol. Through our coastal clean-up, we have collected a lot of kilos of plastic,” shared Doer.

As for the next steps of The Bellevue Resort, Doer explains that “part of the advocacy of the chairman is by next year, the direction... is to use reusable energy in the resort. We will be using a solar panel to light up the resort.”

Last 2016, The Bellevue Resort was hailed as the overall champion in the 16th Ubi Festival in Bohol. This year, they once again participated in the 21st Ubi Cookoff as a support to the advocacy of the provincial government.

Engineer Manuel Gamones and various photos of the lovely resort.

Edith Grand Garden Resort and Adventure Park: THRIVING AMID THE PANDEMIC

BY LEAN TAMARES



WHEN THE COUNTRY was placed under lockdown due to the pandemic, everything stopped. Many establishments had to close down, employees were laid off, and gatherings were prohibited to prevent the spread of the virus. But for the owners of Edith Grand Garden Resort and Adventure Park, these things could not prevent their growth.

Like many others, Mary Jane and Pompey Saturinas also struggled financially because of the lockdown. For an agritourism business like theirs, fewer visitors meant less income. However, the couple was no stranger to challenges. Through their perseverance and the hard work of their staff, they made their business thrive amid the pandemic.

STARTING FROM THE GROUND UP

Ever since she was a child, Mary Jane had always been interested in farming. Her father grew ube, bonsai, and other plants, which inspired her to pursue it as well. This led her to dreaming of having her own farm one day.

When she and her partner, Pompey, saved enough money, they left their job in the

telecommunications industry and started to turn their dreams into reality.

First, they planted dragon fruit. The couple only had minimal knowledge of the crop's farming techniques, so they sought ways to learn how to grow it properly. They attended seminars and training sessions in Manila, and even traveled as far as Dacuycuy Farm in Isabela to learn how to grow the crop and run a plantation.

"*Sabi sa'kin ng partner ko, the easiest way daw is to copy and improve, kaya ayun ang ginawa namin,*" Mary Jane shared.

She said that running the dragon fruit farm was a learning process. To ensure that the posts they used were sturdy enough, the couple used concrete instead of wood. However, they made a mistake with the measurements, using posts that measured only

Edith Grand Garden Resort and Adventure Park is home to many different species of bougainvillea flowers.



one foot in height.

“Nakita namin na sobrang tagal mamunga. Aabot siya ng two years. Sa pagkakaintindi ko ba, kung gagamit tayo ng mahabang planting materials, basically mabilis ka o madali ka makakapag-harvest, ‘di ba?”

Since then, the couple started using 6-foot concrete posts, which enabled them to harvest dragon fruit in just four months.

Once they got the hang of growing dragon fruit, they moved to developing various products with the crop as the main ingredient.

“Nakapag-produce na kami ng ice cream, dragon fruit lumpia, dragon fruit shake, tapos we have wine... Hopefully makapag-create pa kami ng ibang products out of dragon fruit,” Mary Jane said.

Today, the couple is growing grapes, vegetables, and bougainvillea as well. They also expanded the farm into a resort and adventure park that offers fun and thrilling activities.

EXPERIENCE AN ADVENTURE IN NATURE

With a land spanning 56 hectares, one will never run out of places to explore at Edith Grand Garden Resort and Adventure Park. Aside from the dragon fruit farm, visitors can also tour the grape and vegetable plantations. The couple also has a five-hectare bougainvillea farm that houses 377 different species of the flower.

If you would like to be close to nature, then you

can go to the Kangcaramel cave. This cathedral-like cave is the biggest among the five caves in the resort. Although Kangcaramel is open to tourists, some of the caves are still closed for viewing. This goes for those that are still unexplored and are being protected.

The adventure park also has a campsite perfect for those who are interested in camping or having team-building sessions. Visitors who are hungry or curious about the unique products of the resort can go to the Camp Lucas bar, where delicious desserts and drinks are served.

While the resort and adventure park has a lot to offer, Mary Jane said that some improvements were delayed due to the pandemic. These include the zip line and air bicycle rides that they planned to open to visitors. All spa branches of the resort were also closed down.

Still, the couple remains positive. The dirt road leading to the resort is now concrete, making the place even more accessible to visitors. Although there were fewer customers, they still managed to sell their crops everyday.

“Kahit 33 ‘yung taong natira samin, out of 86, 33 na lang yung natira. Pero parang hindi ko minsan naramdaman na nahirapan akong humanap ng pang-sahod sa kanila,” Mary Jane shared.

INSPIRING BUDDING FARMERS

Edith Grand Garden Resort and Adventure

Mary Jane Saturinas is known for her dedication to farming and takes care of all the bougainvillea flowers on their farm.



Park has been recognized by the Department of Agriculture as one of its training institutes. They employ a “big brother-small brother” approach in conducting seminars that support beginning farmers.

“My partner and I, willing *kaming tumulong sa kung sino talaga ang gustong matuto* on how to plant dragon fruits and propagate bougainvillea through A61 propagation,” Mary Jane said, referring to her and her husband’s expertise.

She also said that she will wholeheartedly help other farmers, especially women, so they can earn more money. Even questions that guests ask her about the farm do not go ignored. Mary Jane answers each curious query and openly shares their techniques in growing their crops.

“*Kahit pa may nagsasabi sa aking ‘Uy wag mong sabihin, wag mong i-ano kasi sikreto,’ sinasabi ko hindi... Ba’t ko naman iha-hide? Gusto ko maraming matuto. The more the merrier daw, ika nga,*” she said.

A PIECE OF ADVICE

Mary Jane has learned a lot over the years from managing the resort and adventure park. The pandemic also made her realize the value of many things and how to handle different problems.

“*Sa mga gustong matutong mag-farming, hindi sapat na may pera ka at may talino ka. Dapat talaga [may] puso,*” she said. “*Dapat dedicated ka talaga... Kasi walang mangyayari kung iaasa mo lang sa tauhan mo.*”



Mary Jane’s staff can attest to her passion in farming. She knows every detail of the flowers and crops, and treats each plant like her own child. Whenever guests ask if they can pick a flower or have something for free, Mary Jane’s staff would politely answer that doing so is prohibited out of respect for the love she has for each “child.”

Aside from this, Mary Jane encourages future farm owners to value their staff. She ensures that her staff members are all well-fed, and she shares whatever blessings she and her partner receive with them.

“*Sila rin ang magpapalago sa’yo. Parang, kung mahal mo sila, aangat sila. Pati pamilya nila sabay na aangat sa’yo,*” she said.

Tourists get to explore the massive cave structure of the raw yet breathtaking Kangcaramel Cave in Tanday, Baclayan, Bohol.

UBI MEANS VICTORY:

*Modala Beach Resort
On Being Champion
of the Ubi Cook Off*

BY EILEEN FAY M. VILLEGAS



P

people give meanings to things around them, and for many of us, that includes the food we eat. For Filipinos, root and tuber crops like kamote (sweet potato), gabi (taro), and kamoteng kahoy (cassava) often connote lowliness, almost justifying how they're literally harvested from below ground.

This is mainly because these crops are the staples of rural farming households and are not typically regarded as fine or exquisite. They are still undervalued despite being the healthier option.

Chef Navalta is the creator of the award-winning dishes of Modala Beach Resort that incorporated the revered ubi.

However, this is not the case with ubi (yam), especially in the province of Bohol. Here, ubi is considered almost divine, with a festival dedicated solely for its celebration — now that says a lot about its reputation!

The humble tuber crop is also the reason

Modala Beach Resort in Panglao became known. Having won as champion twice at the Ubi Cook Off during the Ubi Festival, they reinforced the crop's known prestige for Boholanos and created a new symbol for all Filipinos.



“

I'm very proud of my team because they really rallied and did their best... beforehand. I only told them that we will win as champion and we did win as champion

ROMMEL GONZALES

WINNING WITH UBI

Stories from the olden days of Bohol would explain why ubi is so important in the province. During a famine many years ago, ubi saved the starving locals when no other food crop grew on the land.

“Ubi is something that is very important. It's a symbol here in Bohol,” Marcellius Anthony Navalta, Executive Chef at Modala Beach Resort, proudly said.

“Creating food out of it makes me excited,” the chef explained. The victory achieved from the experience was not only his, but also belong to the whole team he tirelessly worked with. “Being in this hotel, I feel very proud. I was not in the competition just for myself. I represented a bigger picture, which is Modala Beach Resort. Since we are the new hotel here [in Panglao], we want to make sure that we can deliver not only great service but, of course, a great experience for the

guests, especially in food and beverage.”

Rommel Gonzales, General Manager and Consultant of Modala Beach Resort, also felt honored to have already made a name in the industry through winning the competition. “I'm very proud of my team because they really rallied and did their best... beforehand. I only told them that we will win as champion and we did win as champion,” he said.

Gonzales was the one who initiated the Ubi Cook Off in Bohol during his presidency at the Bohol Association for Resort and Restaurants (BARR). “It was decided because I know Bohol is an ubi country... the one we know from Baguio is just ube jam. But here in Bohol, ubi is something — a dish for everybody.”

More than showcasing Bohol's staple, the Ubi Cook Off made way for the reimagination of the crop, changing perceptions of people from other parts of the country and the world. It was to define ubi as no longer lowly, but acutely important.



Rommel Gonzales, Modala Beach Resort Manager and one of winning dishes: an Ubi starter (inset).



LEVELING-UP THE CROP

The winning courses of Modala Beach Resort are fairly simple from appetizer to dessert, and each is elevated by none other than the versatile ubi.

The menu opens with an enticing appetizer made with ubi and local eggplant that offers “a refreshing touch in the beginning of our menu.”

On the other hand, the soup was inspired by law-oy, a local vegetable medley known widely in the province. “Basically, it’s a vegetable broth that is made by farmers; it’s a ‘poor man’s broth.’ So instead of that, we used [ubi]. Even though it’s very simple, we can make something out of it at competition level,” Chef Navalta said.

The main dish and dessert further embody Bohol, emphasizing the province’s pride found in its islands and charming hills. “Our main dish focuses on... what most people are able to catch here, so we incorporated ubi together with most of the food from the sea,” Chef Navalta explained.

Chef Navalta also made use of two varieties of ubi for the main dish: a purple one and a white one called binugas. These two are commonly thought of as the only existing varieties of ubi when there are, in fact, seven.

The last course was “inspired by the Chocolate

Hills, but since our dessert is white, I called it ‘White Creamy Hills,’” Chef Navalta said. What made Modala Beach Resort’s entries stand out was the “little bit of surprise” in the dessert. Chef Navalta used a technique to create small spheres of ubi juice on the ubi kinampay agar-agar, mimicking caviar, something not normally found in a dessert. “That’s something you can always add on a competition level,” he added.

By incorporating ubi in food, Modala Beach Resort is able to jazz up simple local dishes and showcase Bohol’s gems through their creativity.

THRIVING THROUGH TOUGH TIMES

Hotels and restaurant businesses like Modala Beach Resort have been greatly affected by the pandemic. When asked about their motivation, General Manager Gonzales only expressed positivity amid the situation.

“This will not end soon. This will continue. But we should look at the pandemic as an opportunity [...] we should look at the avenues where we can progress also. We have some local tourists here coming in,” he said. “If we will open and people come, good. If not, we have to think of something else. You know, do not have that grim thought [...] because negative thinking will not bring you

The White Creamy Hills is a creative interpretation of Bohol’s main attraction as a dessert, beautifully capturing the beauty of Chocolate Hills in a different way.



anywhere else but down.”

For Chef Navalta, making use of ubi in hotel and resort dishes is a way to support the local farmers who also suffered and are working hard to thrive despite the hardships of the pandemic.

“Actually, part of our culture here is to serve our community. In order for the farmers here in Bohol to also sustain, we need to make sure that we support them. I’m quite ecstatic to see this kind of

produce — their crops — are being sold,” he said.

In many ways, food reflects the history of a place with the unique ability to capture the memories of its people. For Boholanos, ubi is not merely a ubiquitous crop; it is also a symbol of their resilience. And for General Manager Gonzales and Chef Navalta, winning the Ubi Cook Off gave them another meaning for the ubi: victory, which is something they hope other Filipinos resonate with.

The main course features an ubi-based croquette and gnocchi along with a sauce made from coconut milk and spices that blend perfectly with the fish caught from the island’s seas.

The soup has a pretty tinge of purple from the ubi, making the usual lawe-oy more intriguing.



STATE OF CALAMITY DULOT NG AFRICAN SWINE FEVER



Ang **Proclamation No. 1143** ay ang legal na basehan ng pamahalaan upang magamit ang pondo ng gobyerno sa panahon ng State of Calamity. Ito ay idineklara ni Pangulong Rodrigo Duterte na magtatagal ng 1 taon.



ANO ANG LAYUNIN NITO?

Masugpo ang ASF



MURA



Mababang presyo

Seguridad ng Pagkain



PAANO ITO MAKAKATULONG?

Maaari nang magamit ang Quick Response Fund ng National/ Local Government Units.



Mapaigting ang mga programa laban sa ASF.

BABAY ASF



Mapalakas ang Biosecurity at mapagtibay ang Border Control.

MAHALAGANG PAALALA:

**WALA PANG MABISANG LUNAS AT
EPEKTIBONG BAKUNA LABAN SA ASF.**



Para sa anumang katanungan o karagdagang kaalaman, sumangguni sa:

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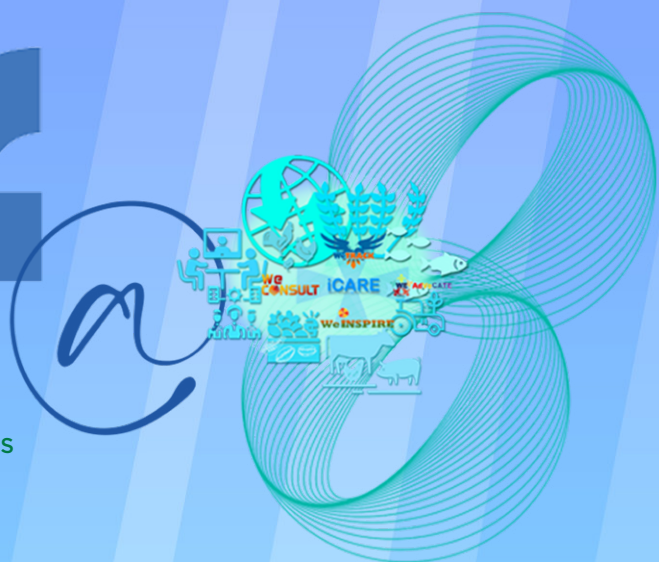
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Issue 291

GREENFIELDS

THE LONGEST-RUNNING PHILIPPINE AGRICULTURAL MAGAZINE



Celebrating Participation, Collaboration, and Innovation

iCARE

Innovative Consultation on A&F Policy Reforms & Engagement



PCAF: 8 Years of Adapting to Challenges

Celebrating Participation, Collaboration, and Innovation



IN JUST A SNAP, the world changed. When the country's economy was disrupted by the Coronavirus (also known as COVID-19), putting the entire Luzon in an enhanced community quarantine on March 16, 2020, the agriculture sector played a major role in pursuing a socio-economic response framework as an aid to the government's recovery efforts.

Although agricultural activities have been allowed to continue during the community quarantines, it is also undeniable that they would come to a halt in compliance with the government's safety measures and protocols. Just like that, everyone was forced to let go of what was normal.

One aspect of normalcy that changed is the face-to-face meetings, dialogues, and consultations between the Department of Agriculture (DA), the Philippine Council for Agriculture and Fisheries (PCAF), and the industry's private-sector partners from different regions.

PCAF's Advisory Special Body (ASB) members

have been voicing out issues and concerns at the local and national levels through face-to-face meetings for more than three decades.

Since the agency was created in 2013, as a result of the consolidation of two agencies—the National Agricultural and Fishery Council (NAFC established in 1986) and the Livestock Development Council (LDC established in 1976) pursuant to Executive Order 366, Series of 2004, PCAF still facilitates broad-based participatory processes in the agriculture and fisheries sector, even during the pandemic.

The agency has been top-of-mind for farmers,

PCAF members standing proud as they celebrate the work they've done for the Philippines over the last 8 years.



fishers, and other stakeholders regarding consultations and dialogues with the government, especially with the officials and policy-makers of the DA.

However, as the country goes through unfamiliar order, the ASB members, who are mostly over 60 years old, were compelled to find new ways to voice out issues and concerns and craft sound policy recommendations to aid the pandemic-stricken industry.

During this time, PCAF, as an agency, needed to adapt, innovate, and elevate its strategies to continue serving its stakeholders, while maintaining the safety of its employees. PCAF embraced its new “service brands” to recalibrate its strategies focused on COVID-19 efforts while still remaining aligned to its mandate.

The agency fully operationalized the Innovative Consultation on Agriculture and Fisheries Policy Reforms and Engagement, known as “i-CARE” program, that holds value-creating strategic shift with four key strategies: 1) expanded value chain-oriented membership; 2) action-oriented policy delivery, 3) ASB affiance to sectoral impact linkages, and 4) result-based organizational development.

These efforts contribute to the DA’s endeavor to address farmers’ and fisherfolks’ concerns on food productivity and availability, food accessibility and mobility, and price stability, even in the height of the pandemic.

THE CONSULTATION

As part of the new normal, PCAF’s We

Collaborate with Networks of Agriculture and Fisheries Stakeholders to Unify and Lead Transformation (WeCONSULT) transitioned from conventional face-to-face meetings to online consultation through various digital platforms to ensure the safety of the participants.

Although there was a shift, PCAF still ensures the high-quality standard of output in the consultations. When DA launched its initiative to ensure food security for the entire country by mitigating the effects of COVID-19, the Regional Agricultural and Fishery Council (RAFC) saw the need to conduct their respective video conferences to capture the issues and concerns at the municipal and provincial levels.

With their expertise, the RAFC Chairpersons and members provided immediate action to address these issues.

THE MONITORING

The pandemic forced the agency to refocus its monitoring activities and approach.

As per DA memorandum dated April 14, 2020, all bureaus, attached agencies, and regional field offices (RFOs) were to refocus their activities under the General Appropriations Act for the remaining months of the year into activities in line with DA’s objectives. These include enhancing productivity, food supply availability, food accessibility, and food price stability.

The DA also gave instructions to ensure food productivity and availability, which included the engagement of government agencies and the

As everywhere else, meetings and conferences have now been adapted to the digital world. Even through the pandemic, PCAF is able to continue connecting people.



Various photos showcasing PCAF's achievements and events. The work continues on!

private sector in the monitoring of COVID-19-related policies and programs to ensure transparency in the process.

As the mechanism for private sector participation in development processes at the regional, provincial, city, and municipal levels, the Agricultural and Fishery Councils (AFCs) focused the monitoring activities based on the Memorandum of Agreement between PCAF and DA-RFOs, especially concerning the transfer and utilization of the AFC monitoring fund. These include AFC's monitoring of various DA and PCAF-assisted projects and activities, such as validating Civil Society Organization accreditation, registry system for basic sectors in agriculture, and other similar tasks.

Under the guidance of PCAF's We Transform Results into Actions through Collaboration and Knowledge Sharing (WeTRACK), AFCs conducted weekly validation of basic commodity prices in supermarkets and public markets as reported by DA and/or local price-coordinating councils.

AFCs also monitored the implementation of the Social Amelioration Program, a cash subsidy program provided by the national government to low-income families during the pandemic.

The AFCs specifically monitor the provision of cash assistance to farmers and fishers in their respective localities. The Council also monitored the implementation of the components of the Ahon Lahat, Pagkaing Sapat (ALPAS) Kontra sa COVID-19, more popularly known as Plant, Plant, Plant Program on the regional and local levels.

The monitoring also included the DA capacity

development activities for farmers and fishers, ensuring that good agricultural practices and technologies are being properly utilized to increase food sufficiency.

THE WOMEN AND MEN OF PCAF

True to its commitment to value people empowerment and good governance, PCAF shifted its work strategy by innovating consistent workplace communication. The management initiated a mechanism for its employees through a work-from-home monitoring scheme. They also opened communication channels to all its employees using social media and video conferencing applications.

The Xennials (born 1977-1983), Gen X (born 1965-1980), Gen Jones (born 1955-1965), and the Boomers (born 1946 to 1964) were obliged to use instant messaging apps that streamline important discussions, task deployment, and engagement and empowerment of employees. With this, PCAF can use essential feedback from employees to adjust its internal policies while keeping everyone's safety a priority.

PCAF has stayed at the frontlines to address various issues and concerns in the industry, showing that even the pandemic cannot slow it down from serving its stakeholders.

Despite all the challenges, the agency is still hopeful on its eighth anniversary. After all, there are still a good number of reasons to celebrate, collaborate, and innovate for the benefit of the people in the agriculture and fishery sector.





CHILDHOOD MEMORIES AND CHOCOLATE DRINKS:

Mommy Cecilia Comes Home To A Cacao Farm

Cecilia de Leon, fondly called as Mommy Cecilia planting cacao trees with Dalareich Polot and Greenfields Magazine Managing Editor, Disnee Dioso.

Mommy Cecilia, reaches one of the cacao pods in her beloved farm.

THERE IS NOTHING more comforting than the scent and warmth that a cup of hot chocolate brings.

Cecilia de Leon, now known as Mommy Cecilia of Cecee's Organic Farm and Cacao Nursery, still remembers how her grandmother would make the drink for her when she was a child. If not *sikwate*, she would usually come home to champorado, or other food cooked using the cacao from their backyard. Even when she was in college, going home brought a sense of excitement knowing there was something waiting for her.

Decades later, after living in the US with her family, this remains true. The cacao trees in their old home waited for her return.

STARTING THE NURSERY

Mommy Cecilia came back to the Philippines and found that their family had plenty of idle land. To put it to good use, her brother had managed it, and she was introduced to *Plantacion de Sikwate*. There, Mommy Cecilia learned about the “criollo” or the heirloom variety of cacao, three of which were found in their backyard.

Criollos are now rarely produced by farmers and considered a luxury chocolate. The tree originated from

Central and South America and was brought to the Philippines by Spanish friars. Mommy Cecilia searched for these cacao varieties throughout Calape and found that most of them were old and diseased, yet still producing fruit.

“We always visited household to household and found the cacao trees were kind of taken for granted,” Mommy Cecilia said. They were typically used only for family consumption, with the owners unaware of its other benefits that were present all year round.

“*Yung* three trees *na cacao [na]* we found, *parang ni-nurture namin* by rehabilitating... and we found *na 'pag maganda na—dahil* diseased *yun eh so maganda na—criollo* was in demand.”

To spread awareness and bring the cacao trees back to health, Mommy Cecilia started rehabilitating the plants. They began in 2018 and started with their barangay, where they worked on 89 trees. Mommy Cecilia's group then expanded to other towns in Calape and reached out to 11 other towns in Bohol. They are currently rehabilitating 3,500 criollo cacao trees.

CHANGES AND CHALLENGES

“My advocacy was to spread awareness, to let the old cacao owners realize that they have something that, if maintained properly, gives bigger monetary benefits,” Mommy Cecilia said.

According to her, most of the cacao owners were already senior citizens content with the minimal benefits they get from the plant. Changing their mindset proved to be a big challenge for Mommy Cecilia. However, involving young people helped in changing people's perception of cacao trees.

"That's the only way *na maano namin dahil* seriously, *yung mga seniors*, old *dito*, they're not into change, especially if it's something that they have been used to. They can't see beyond the personal benefits. *Tama na yun sa kanila na makapagluto sila ng champorado.*"

Through Mommy Cecilia's perseverance, she and her fellow cacao owners were able to reach an understanding. They conducted seminars and demonstrations so the community could learn how to take care of their trees and earn from them.

"In the beginning, *nahirapan kami*, but like all Filipinos, maybe it's always to see is to believe," Mommy Cecilia shared.

THE UNKNOWN TREASURE THAT CACAO BRINGS

One thing that piqued people's interest in cacao farming was the profit that could be gained from it. Most people thought that cacao beans were the only ones that would sell, but that was not the case for Cecee's Organic Farm and Cacao Nursery.

According to Mommy Cecilia, they can sell the whole plant, from its beans to its leaves.

"We started with the seeds. When we break the pod, we make the decision how many to plant and how many to ferment or dry for the chocolatiers. So, with that, we make money," she said.

There are 40 to 50 seeds in a single pod, and if they decide to plant everything, at least 25 or 30 of the seeds would grow and can be sold as rootstock. This can be sold for Php 28 to Php 30, depending on the variety. In just one pod, they can sell at least Php 700 worth of rootstocks.

Currently, the cacao nursery has 34 hectares of planted seedlings.

The seeds, which are most often used, are dried and sold to chocolatiers for Php 120 per kilo. They also ferment these to retain the quality of flavor. The fermented beans can be sold at Php 200 a kilo.

If it's the heirloom variety, then they can plant the seeds to produce a mother plant. After four months, they graft these with the old criollo trees. Farmers who want to plant their own criollo cacao can buy scions for Php 120.

Aside from these, Mommy Cecilia also makes use of the empty pods as fertilizer. Some farmers even buy these from them because of the pods' unique vermicast.

Recently, they also started catering to non-farmers who are interested in buying different parts of cacao.

"The cacao shells, we make money out of those too. We don't waste anything. Lately, the Japanese are more interested and trying to utilize them," she shared.

According to Mommy Cecilia, artists who are into crafts and design use the pods in their projects. They have also received orders for skeletonized cacao leaves, which they sell for Php 3.50 per leaf.

If one took the time to do the math, then they'd understand just how much money can be earned from cacao farming.

"Part of our advocacy is to train the farmer, and the children, and the family that if you do this, you earn this," Mommy Cecilia said.

Bohol's chocolate princess, Dalareich Polot, shared how she found an ally in Mommy Cecilia. The chocolatier has always been talking about the advantages of pursuing cacao farming on TikTok.

"[After] several years doing this, *si mommy, siya talaga yung*, well, *sabihin ko na nakahanap ako [sa kanya] ng kakampi*," Polot said.

Now 75 years old, Mommy Cecilia's age posed a few challenges in pursuing cacao farming, especially during the lockdown, since she wasn't allowed to go out and travel. Still, it did not hinder her in helping the community realize the real value of their cacao trees.

"*Mahirap din ang mindset. So ang kinoncentrate namin*, mindset *na muna*. It's never too late."





Gastronomic Tourism and Community

BY JOY ANGELI UY

THE WORLD FOOD TRAVEL ASSOCIATION defines Food Tourism (or Gastronomic Tourism) as the ‘act of traveling for a taste of place to get a sense of place.’ This taste of place manifests in a destination’s *terroir*, or the differentiated expression of a territory in local products and services, particularly in their culinary commodities and foodscapes. This *terroir*, therefore, shapes and defines a region’s food and drink culture. However, the community of a territory also plays a major role in shaping its gastronomic identity, as they are the characters that continually create and influence a region’s *terroir* through its history, traditions, and way of life.

The World Food Travel Association defines Food Tourism (or Gastronomic Tourism) as the ‘act of traveling for a taste of place to get a sense of place.’ This taste of place manifests in a destination’s *terroir*, or the differentiated expression of a territory in local products and services, particularly in their culinary commodities and foodscapes. This *terroir*, therefore, shapes and defines a region’s food and drink culture. However, the community of a territory also plays a major role in shaping its gastronomic identity, as they are the characters that continually create and influence a region’s *terroir* through its history, traditions, and way of life.

Therefore, it is important to develop a sense of community in developing regions into gastronomic destinations. Even if an area has a volume of resources available, then a host community must understand its role in developing these into tourism products. In Bohol, we have several gastronomic communities — farmlands, dairy facilities, fishing villages, food manufacturers, delicacy producers, street food vendors, butchers, restaurateurs, chefs, chocolatiers, and salt makers, among others. We

also have more than a handful of heritage produce, recipes, food products, and agricultural practices at our disposal.

Yet, despite these, we have not been able to transform Bohol into a gastronomic destination. This could be attributed to how locals regard these traditions. We’ve grown up in a society wherein these foodscapes are just simply too commonplace for us to see their true value as part of our culture and identity. We end up taking them for granted. Moreover, these ‘traditional’ foodscapes do not fit into our collective perception of how tourism should look: clean and picture-perfect. Perhaps, it’s just for practical and economic reasons. Our long stretches of white sandy beaches are just easier to sell than our ‘smelly’ wet markets brimming with local flavor and culture. And as the case may be, for the longest time, our quintessential “Bohol Countryside Tour” has always been the tourism industry’s cash cow that paved the way for steady economic growth for the province. With this, we felt that we did not need to look elsewhere for opportunities.

As we stumbled into the pitfalls of mass tourism,

we continually engaged in the philosophy of “more is more,” largely to the detriment of our environment and our local communities. We pressured ourselves to pack our tour buses with tourists constantly. We send them in droves to see the famous Chocolate Hills or to partake of lunch at the Loboc River Cruise. The experiences of our visitors to our island have become diluted with every arrival of the next batch of people who would take their place; these travelers never truly get to sense the spirit of Bohol as they rarely get authentic experiences of the island. As a result, we’ve built tourism on fleeting moments — for them, Bohol becomes a mere acquaintance. This also limited the positive economic gains of mass tourism to a select few in Bohol. A majority of our agri-alimentary communities still remain excluded from its economic benefits.

However, if the community can value our culture and identity, and leverage these to transform our terroir into a gastronomic destination, we will be able to devise more memorable experiences which could enable tourists to encounter the island more intimately. In the podcast ‘EAT WELL, TRAVEL BETTER: Episode 14’, Ms. Alison Burgh speaks about how meeting local people and eating local cuisine is one of the best ways to understand the local culture. Through meal-sharing and similar gastronomic experiences, travelers become more immersed in an area’s local culture, facilitating a better appreciation and recollection of their experiences. As visitors engage and share this appreciation with the host community, this helps them develop a sense of pride in what they do or offer. Ms. Burgh posits that “local communities need the confidence to build on their own cultures.” This confidence cannot be built if we cannot bring together the different stakeholders to a common understanding of who we are as a people and what we are trying to achieve for the destination.

Truly, developing a sense of community in our local gastronomy actors is essential. We must convince them to take pride in their craft and identity for them to actively take part in turning the terroir into a tourism offering. But this can only be done if the tourism sector can assure that these opportunities can enrich people’s lives in the community. Thus, forming bonds of community is not only limited to gastronomic actors but must also apply to the broader tourism sector. All our communities need to recognize their interconnectedness to their shared identity as Boholanos.

As we pivot our offerings away from mass tourism through gastronomic experiences, we should also come together as a community to ensure that our offerings are not invasive or detrimental to our society. Intimate, tailor-made culinary excursions may also be as guilty as our “all-inclusive countryside tour packages.” Hans Magnus Enzensberge aptly described this in a quote: “Tourism destroys what it seeks by finding it.” As tourists search for remarkable adventures in our gastronomic landscape, we all should render our duty to safeguard our culture, heritage, and environment in the process.





Farmers Profitability Above All: Bohol Agriculture Recognized under the One DA Reform Program

BY BOHOL GOVERNOR ARTHUR C. YAP

ONE OF THE GOOD THINGS which resulted from our bout with Covid 19 was the renewed focus on agriculture. People flocked back to the rural countryside whenever and wherever they could. This move was either a deliberate choice to escape the congested cities, or a result of being let go from work by businesses that were gravely affected by the andemic.

Pictures of farms, crops, produce, food, recipes, and rural scenes dominated social media. I welcomed it, but I hoped that the important lessons of agriculture would not be lost on our people. First, no country can rise and develop unless it can feed itself. Second, no country can feed itself unless farmers and fisherfolk are profitable.

Profitability of farmers and fisherfolk must be our objective above all else. Only when farm producers are profitable will they and their children continue to stay in agriculture. They are the providers of raw materials and nutrition that power our nation's development in the years to come.

What do America, China, Brazil, Thailand, and Vietnam have in common? They are countries with strong economies founded on a profitable agriculture sector. Because these countries focused on agriculture, they are food exporters with low levels of poverty.

Profitable farming in turn only happens when scale, water and soil, mechanization, processing, credit and market access are all part of the equation of production and sales. Today, the Department of Agriculture (DA) under Sec. William Dar has painstakingly outlined these factors in 18 key strategies that seek to modernize and make Philippine Agriculture profitable under

the One DA Reform Program.

This, I hope, is something our local governments will take to heart and implement.

However, agriculture will not be able to profit if we aim to do everything. We must choose to develop key strategic crops, those that have cross-cutting benefits to ensure food security and profitability for our local communities.

For example, rice production is very close to the hearts of our farmers and people. It is no mistake that the logo of our DA bears the image of the *palay* crop to highlight that special relationship. It is a key strategic crop considering we Filipinos are rice eaters, and in Bohol, we have at least 45,000 hectares of rice production lands. Internationally, it is also dangerous to totally place the dependence on imported rice because globally, rice, unlike corn, soy, sorghum or wheat, has the smallest percentage of excess for trade at 5%. Calamities, wars, the cost of logistics, fuel, and supply disruptions can destabilize the supply of rice at any time, so we must strive to have our own buffer stocks as much as we can.

However, to stay in paddy rice production is to limit our farmers to a crop that sells anywhere between Php 18 to Php 22 per kilo, while milled rice can sell from Php 45 per kilo upwards. Special milled rice varieties can even sell from Php 80 to



Php 120 pesos per kilo upwards. In Bohol, 27% of the gross value added to agriculture is in palay. That is something that Bohol needs to work on. If more than a quarter of Bohol's agriculture stays in paddy rice production instead of the more lucrative rice production, then we will have a difficult time to increase the value of Bohol's agriculture.

To make this point, we gave a buy back component to our focused rice cluster production areas. We are buying at a minimum support price Php 20 per kilo of clean and dry palay. This is so that we can process it into our own *Bugas ni Dagohoy* or Bohol Farmers Milled Rice, which we are selling at Php 45 per kilo. For the first time, Bohol's farmers are experiencing what it is like to mill, package, and sell their own rice.

What's After Rice?

We need to understand the unique advantage of Bohol. Bohol does not only have about 1.4 million local residents, but pre-Covid, it has shown the capacity to support the arrival of more than 1.5 million annual visitors. Bohol is also just an hour and a half away by sea from the bigger market of Cebu, which has three times more consumption and is a hub for domestic and foreign sales.

Bohol's unique advantage as a tourism destination and its location in Central Visayas are the best reasons to focus on higher value commodities like livestock, dairy, poultry, and fishery products. Hog meat and native chicken can be sold upwards of Php 250 per kilo, while dairy and fishery products are not only high value, but critical to ensuring nutrition and a better diet for residents.

To support these, there are three critical commodities deserving of our attention: corn, root-crops, and coconut. Together with rice, these three commodities cross-cut food security for people and the fundamental ingredients for feed stocks that can power the livestock, hog, poultry, dairy and fishery industries. Without affordable feeds, there is no future to grow these food sectors. At present, the corn and root-crops sectors combined do not even make up 4% of the agriculture economy. And yet, feeds comprise more than 60% of the cost for growing livestock, hog, poultry, dairy, and fishery products. How much, then, are the booster or starter feeds for animals and fishery? For the first time ever, they cost more than rice. While rice can be bought at Php 40 per kilo, feeds now cost more than Php 45 per kilo. Only when feeds become more available can farmers grow animals for food, something that we do not have to teach our growers.

Furthermore, root-crops can give birth to high value products which can be used for additives and raw materials that are suitable for baking and confectionaries. These include ice creams, drinks, and other food security staples. Coconut, on the other hand, can be processed into virgin coconut oil, cooking oil, detergent, personal health care products, fuel, planting medium, and other medicinal purposes.

Where Do We Go Next?

Again, we must go back to taking advantage of our tourism economy and proximity to Cebu. Since we have access to high value markets, the next round of concentrations should be in vegetables, fruits, coffee,



Secretary William Dar paying a visit to Bohol and trying out the DA-Philmech machinery used for farming with Bohol Gov. Arthur Yap.

and cacao. Vegetables are harvestable in just one to two months, while fruits, coffee, and cacao are high value and sustainable.

For these crops, nurseries must keep on producing planting materials and more importantly, a strong partnership with the private sector must be engendered so a constant demand can be assured for these products. Working with business groups and restaurants, resorts, hotels, and local entrepreneurs, the objective is first to open up the markets. Next, we must show farmers and fisherfolk that customers are ready to buy their products to assure them that their sales and profitability are at the heart of our programs.

Key Takeaways

In the space of a few paragraphs, we have talked about many products and considerations. However, the key take-away must not be to do everything and focus on everything. Keep in mind that for Bohol, we will only be focusing on rice, corn, root crops, coconut, fruits, vegetables, coffee, and cacao. These eight key crop sectors should be targeted for increasing production, producing them efficiently, and adding value to them. This is essential to developing other related and connected agri sub-sectors.

Of course, to support this effort, we will need to put up a Soil and Water Center, invest in farm mechanization, post harvest facilities, nurseries, biosecurity, and other science based solutions as

part of our production process. Credit, financing, and market access must also be part of the solutions. To this end, we find the DA's efforts in coming up with 18 key strategies under the One DA Reform Program very useful, thanks to Sec. William Dar.

I also wish to thank Sec. Dar for making Bohol a pilot province for the Province-Led Agri-Fishery Extension Systems (PAFES) and recognizing our Agri-Fishery Program as a model for other LGUs to follow. It is a clear signal that the national and local units must be working closely together and in a coordinated way. Sec. Dar correctly observed that DA must steer as the LGUs must row so that in the end, we can still achieve greater productivity. This is most important during an unprecedented time when global population growth, the degradation of water and soil systems, and the impact of development and pollution on our seas are posing the greatest threat to humanity's survival.

We can do it if we will always remember that farmers' profitability is above all.

Note: Governor Arthur Yap served as Secretary of Agriculture of the Philippines from 2004-2010. He was a member of Congress from 2010-2019, finishing his stint as Deputy Speaker of the House for the Visayas. Presently, he is serving as Governor of Bohol.

IN THE FOREST AND MOUNTAINS
ANIMALS DO NOT LEAVE TRASH
HUMANS DO. PLEASE BEHAVE LIKE ANIMALS!

We Care BECAUSE We Love: THE ATBANG FARM FOOD FOREST MANTRA

BY JUNALYN ALIVIO

“It was kind of an obligation to start with,” Efrenia “Neng” C. Holt said.

The History of Atbang Farm Food Forest

In 2003, Neng’s mother was diagnosed with cancer, so she immediately came back to her hometown to look after her, taking a four-month career break from work in England. During those months, her mother said she didn’t have anybody to look after their farm. Neng’s mother also revealed some news: she was going to leave the farm to her daughter. Her mother said this even though she knew Neng was already settled in the UK.

Without hesitation and without consulting her family back in England, Neng immediately said “yes” to her mama’s wish. She said it was natural for her to accept the challenge.

Preparations had already gone underway just before Neng left the Philippines to fly back to the UK. With land papers arranged, sorted, and finalized, off she flew to finish the work she had left before returning.

The farm Neng inherited is located on a valley of opposite sloping farm fields with a stream running through the bottom of the fields. Given its location and topography, it seemed only fitting to call it Atbang Farm, as *atbang* was a Visayan word that meant “the opposite side,” as Neng explained.

Permaculture: A Way of Farming

A permaculture-inspired farm in Calape, Bohol, Atbang Farm places importance on caring for and respecting nature. Their own farm inputs are sourced around the forest, so expensive and commercial agricultural fertilizers and chemicals are a big no-no in the Food Forest vicinity.

One of their farming methods uses JADAM Liquid Fertiliser (JLF), which is full of microorganisms that leave the soil alive and healthy. Healthy soil means healthy plants, which in turn produces healthy crops for healthy food that people can eat for a healthier lifestyle. There is no waste in ecological, permaculture methods of farming and regenerative agriculture.

Farmers here also place the utmost care and love into the land. That’s why Mother Nature has blessed them with a variety of high value crops, such as naturally grown cacao trees, durian, mangosteen, coconut trees, and much more. Neng emphasized their philosophy of caring for oneself and one’s surroundings. Thus, the “We care because we love” mantra was born.

Neng genuinely enjoyed her journey into

“

Living Bridge - My little project last year at the farm together with my farmers team. Yes, they are also my carpenters, plumbers, electricians and musicians too! So proud of them. Even if I am not physically there, things are getting done at the farm. They do not need me there really. I call it a living bridge because the main structures of this bridge are alive. As you can see, there are lots of shoots on both sides of the wooden floor. We will train these new shoots to grow as we wish to form a living rail barrier. It’s working!

EFRENIA C. HOLT



The various wonderful places and products offered at the farm.

Efrenia C. Holt
with Val Turtur,
Chairman of the
Philippine Cacao
Industry Council
and President
of CIDAMI

regenerative agriculture's ways and practices as she recently posted this update on their **Atbang Farm Food Forest Facebook page**:

Living Bridge – *My little project last year at the farm together with my farmers team. Yes, they are also my carpenters, plumbers, electricians and musicians too! So proud of them. Even if I am not physically there, things are getting done at the farm. They do not need me there really. I call it a living bridge because the main structures of this bridge are alive. As you can see, there are lots of shoots on both sides of the wooden floor. We will train these new shoots to grow as we wish to form a living rail barrier. It's working!* – Neng Holt

As you walk through Atbang Farm Food Forest, you will be reminded of the signage on the picture, which Neng herself painted. It reads, "In the forest and mountains animals do not leave trash, humans do. Please behave like animals!"

Atbang Farm Food Forest Products

Atbang Farm's Food Forest has a vast number of coconut trees. Nowadays, copra, the by-product of coconut, is very cheap. "I needed to do something about it," Neng said. She thought of turning the harvested coconut fruits into virgin coconut oil (VCO) as their first product.

Then came *tablea* (cacao). Neng grew cacao from seedlings together with her farmers at Atbang Food

Forest, grafting them in their nursery. It was during this time that she was going back and forth between the Philippines and the UK. Neng made sure to time it so that the cacao seedlings were growing by the time she returned in June, the start of the rainy season.

This was really hard work since they didn't have ready-made roads to transport the seedlings. Instead of motor vehicles, they used the carabao and rode on a *balsa* (bamboo raft), rain or shine. Eventually, they did it. The cacao trees are now three years old, and they have since then started harvesting and making chocolate, tableya, and cocoa powder.

Advice for Aspiring Young Female Agri-preneurs

"Engaging in agriculture and farming is the most fulfilling thing you can do," Neng said. "It's a complete process: you plant, you grow, you harvest, you cook, you process, and then you understand how it goes. Even your poop is really important to the whole because it goes with everything. If you look at what's around us, like the animals, it goes back to the soil."

Neng encourages everyone to avoid looking at it like a cliché. Just because you're a farmer doesn't mean that it's a job to be looked down on — it is more than "just" being a farmer. You may even say to yourself, "Oh! That's what my mom and dad were doing." At the end of the day, you need to study the things that you can do and improve on with love.

Ang SAYSAY Ng Agrikultura

Manay's Farm

BY MIKAELA GABRIELLE E. FERNANDEZ

“IF WE JUST TRIED TO REALLY PAY attention to mother earth, if we take care of nature, it teaches us so much. Nature really, truly provides,” shared Jean, otherwise known as Saysay, CEO and Owner of Manay's Farm.

The earth's ecosystem is naturally sustainable and self-sufficient. Multitudes of natural resources are available to sustain the needs of all living beings on this planet. However, more and more consumers are becoming dependent on business establishments for their daily source of food. That is why when the Covid-19 pandemic emerged, many Filipinos struggled to sustain their needs due to the limited access to food – something that can be prevented through food security and growing one's own crops. This is what Manay's Farm aims to showcase.

Jean narrated, *“Isa sa ventures namin dito sa farm is to really produce farm to table experience. It's not just a marketing slogan. It's really our food system. So we grow everything you need, and you pick them, including na rin yung pag-gamit ng native chicken and native pork for our recipes.”*

Manay's Farm is an integrated, diversified organic farm and is an accredited Learning Site for Agriculture by ATI-7. They offer farm-to-table

dining through Taste Native, and complimentary recreational and healing activities, as well as wellness products through their Kaayo Project. They aim to build an integrated, self-sufficient system where they can thrive on their own and have food ready for their guests.

The common misconception about farming is that you need a large plot of land in order to grow crops, but that is simply not the case. You can grow crops even in a small pot, and this is what Jean's mom aims to advocate.

“Part of her advocacy is you can plant anywhere, everywhere,” Jean said about her mom, the titular Manay or Nunila Mendez-Pinat, the former Mayor of San Miguel Bohol.

She added, *“Yung mama ko ang vision niya talağa is maging learning site; she wants to teach and she wants to influence the younger generation wholeheartedly. Yun talağa yung [passion] niya. Kaya nga integrated, kasi gusto niya pag may*

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JEAN SAYSAY

bumisita, gusto niya makita ng mga tao that you can grow your own food you can survive and have be more like secure in terms of food.”

Manay's farm, through Taste Native, boasts a series of sumptuous organic dishes that feature native chicken such as the slow-roast chicken – a mouthwatering dish with ginger and lemongrass, slow-roasted in coconut juice, the *halang-halang* or chicken curry Bohol version – a favorite among guests, and the classic hearty Filipino tinola. They also have dishes made with organic pork, such as the traditional lechon and the Tirk Khngay or gingered adobo – a take on Cambodia's traditional food.

They also have a newly added tilapia farm that they plan to integrate into their menu once the fish are fully grown for consumption.

“We aim to provide a traceable food dining experience.”

Manay's farm also recently joined Bohol's annual Ubi Festival in the home-cooked category. The festival aims to showcase ubi as a staple food for Boholanos, and the many different food recipes that can be made from the beloved root crop.

Jean and her team prepared a dish called 'Law-Uy', a traditional vegetable soup from the municipality of San Miguel Bohol, and a dessert called the 'Not So "Ube" Jam', featuring two kinds of ubi, the Kinampay and the Baligonhon, which won them second place.

Jean used to be an OFW in Cambodia, where she worked as a successful HR professional for a big company in Cambodia. But when she went home to the Philippines one day to take a break from work, she visited the farm and realized its opportunities for growth and expansion. From there, she decided to stay and establish Manay's Farm.

However, Jean encountered a lot of challenges and setbacks when she was first starting. She faced logistical issues and difficulties in the process, but refused to give up. She sought help from various organizations and joined several programs where she met a community of farmers, from whom she learned through their shared experiences.

“I am very lucky to be chosen by the ATI-7 as a mentee for their Kapatid Agri Mentor Me program under the Go Negosyo. I met multiple farmers having the same difficulties or challenges, especially during the time of the pandemic. If it weren't for them, or hearing them tell their stories and their struggles in farming, I think I would have stopped as well. So it was also very inspiring,” Jean recounted her experiences in the Go Negosyo program.

Eventually, Jean's efforts paid off, and led to the farm becoming what it is today.

Composed of youth aged 32 and under, as well as *nanays* and *tatays* with decades of experiences in traditional agriculture, Manay's farm is a fusion of



the new and old ways of farming.

“*Yung farm natin* is really trying to incorporate both the old ways and the new ways. You have to be open to the experiences *ng mga nanay* and *tatay natin*, the older generation experienced it before so *mas maganda* to learn from them. But *hindi ibig sabihin* that you just hire the older generation and *yung mas mga may experience kasi* a lot of innovative ideas you can really take from the younger generation. *D’un papasok yung* we try to process their value-adding. It’s not enough these days to plant the food.”

Aside from taste native, Jean also launched the Kaayo project, a social enterprise where they create traceable tea that will directly benefit the Bayongan Association of Women and the submerge farmers of Bayongan dam.

Fueled by her desire to create sustainable alternative job opportunities, Jean took up herbalism classes to learn the art of tea making. She then tapped women from Bayongan to produce tea made from lemongrass or *tanglad*.

The more she got involved with the community, the more she realized the need for systemic reforms to address the problems faced by rural communities.

“I realized to make things more sustainable and practical *na din*, and you can’t really do it alone. You have to reach out to organizations, you have to reach out to the government for help. So I applied

for a job [in the government].”

Jean then submitted a proposal regarding the creation of a livelihood entrepreneurship agri-enterprise development unit or LEADS. Upon approval, this will aid the Women’s Association in the 18 barangays of San Miguel, Bohol in the production of sustainable livelihood opportunities.

Currently, Jean is assisting the women’s association in five barangays of San Miguel in developing value-added products, namely *tableya* from Poblacion, cocoa from Santo Niño, squash noodles in Kagawasan, kamote chips in Gracia, and processed meat in Mahayag.

As to the key to success in her agricultural and community projects, Jean shared, “I think the first thing that you need to do, for me, that was very effective, was to listen. Listen without judgement, and listen not to tell them what to do next. Just listen, and then come back by not telling them again what to do, but show them what you’re trying to do for them. It just speaks volumes.”

She added, “It’s up to us younger generation to really advocate for agriculture and value adding initiatives for agriculture, because there is money in agriculture. Nature provides if we just take a break and really start appreciating what we have, and innovate and learn from others. Do your part as well. You have to study and train. Nobody wakes up with all the knowledge *na agad-agad*.”

Jean at the farm with Dalareich Polot and Greenfields’ magazine Managing Editor, Disnee Dioso.

Jean’s farm produces many kinds of products for sale, made fresh and straight from what they grow.

GROWING FOOD AND FEEDING PEOPLE THE ORGANIC WAY:

Marilou Escalona's Passion and Purpose in Agriculture

BY EILEEN FAY M. VILLEGAS



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I hope people, especially the youth and women, could do backyard planting and raising of livestock at home so they too could see the benefits of farming

MARILOU ESCALONA

IT'S A GOOD THING TO KNOW that the demand for more sustainable ways of living increases as more people become conscious of the relevant socioeconomic issues today like food insecurity and climate change, as well as health and well-being.

There are different ways to adapt and partake in solving these problems, and for Marilou Escalona, organic farming is a prudent venture to take.

Marilou runs Egay's Farm in Bingag, Daus, Bohol that aims to fully operate on the more sustainable and environment-friendly approach to agriculture that is organic farming.

FROM CONVENTIONAL TO ORGANIC

Organic agriculture fundamentally adheres to the natural way of producing food that Marilou started appreciating as a child who grew up on a farm.

"It started when I was young. My grandparents taught us how to raise chickens, plant vegetables and crops, and even sell them," she recalled.

Marilou learned to appreciate agriculture at a young age, experienced so much delight from planting crops and taking care of animals.

In the beginning, Egay's Farm operated through conventional farming, wherein much of the crop

and livestock production relies on synthetic fertilizers and feeds.

But Marilou soon realized how the chemical contents of these inputs affected both the environment and people's health. Because of this, she decided it was high time to make the switch.

"We used a lot of chemical fertilizers and herbicides at first, but I wasn't happy about its harmful effects to us, that's why I converted our operations to organic farming," she said.

Transitioning from conventional to organic farming was not an overnight activity, especially for already established farms whose soils have been heavily pervaded by unfriendly substances.

Marilou mentioned that it took them almost three years to convert the land alone and adapt alternatives to lessen, then slowly get rid of, their usage of chemicals in the field.

Aside from this, she had to train and attend several seminars on organic agriculture to acquire technical knowledge about the venture. Although



this was more of a gain than a burden to her as she has only genuine enthusiasm to learn about it.

“Nowadays people are feeding animals with high growth hormones that are possibly cancerous, while the plants and vegetables we eat are sprayed with lots of insecticides and herbicides. I hope people, especially the youth and women, could do backyard planting and raising of livestock at home so they too could see the benefits of farming,” she said.

HER PASSION AND PURPOSE

Although farming interested Marilou at an early age, it took a while to heed the calling of her passion as she was persuaded to follow her kin's line of profession in the medical field.

Before being a farm owner, she worked as a nurse in hospitals in the Philippines and abroad. She lived in Saudi Arabia for several years, then later in Laguna and Manila. It was only in 2006 that she decided to go back to Bohol and acquire a small portion of land to begin her agriculture endeavor.

“We started only with one hectare, which cost 20 pesos per square meter then. Today, the value of the land is 5,000 pesos per square meter,” she said, recalling how they started the now 4.6-hectare Egay's Farm.

For Marilou, the passion for farming and purpose to feed people push her to continue improving and developing the farm, which now offers a range of activities and services that let people experience farming with their own hands.

In Egay's Farm, guests have the freedom to harvest vegetables, pick fruits that are in season, pet animals, and even ride their *kalabawe* used for tilling the land, and catch native chickens for that full experience of life on the farm.

One of the features of Egay's Farm is their homegrown vegetables like lettuce that guests can pick by themselves for a firsthand experience of harvesting.

“We sell native chickens at 300 pesos, if dressed; the live ones are 250 pesos a piece. We also have complementary juices like tea made from rosella and blue ternate, which we sell at 350 per pack,” she added.

Marilou poses in a field of roselle plants whose flowers are ready to be turned into juice or tea for guests to enjoy.

Not only that, but guests may also opt to have the harvested produce and livestock like native pigs, roasted as *lechon de leche*, be served in the farm's restaurant—literally displaying the farm-to-table concept.

Some of the sumptuous dishes along side a selection of the natural-made fruit juices made at Egay's Farm. A refreshing taste paired with an elegant appearance.



“People nowadays are eating fast food too much, that’s why I had this idea of building a farm with a restaurant—to go back to the traditional way of producing and preparing food, to do slow food cooking. It’s what I learned from my family when I was young,” she said.

TEACHING PEOPLE ABOUT FARMING

Aside from being an organic farm, Egay’s Farm is also a Learning Site accredited by the Agricultural Training Institute (ATI) of the Department of Agriculture (DA) since 2018.

Marilou shares that ATI has given her technical support like provision of seeds, gardening tools, and other supplies, including monetary support and incentives to conduct her own training.

“The farm is also a TESDA Farm School offering Agricultural Organic Production NC II with five competencies, such as making organic concoction, making of organic fertilizer, vermicomposting, raising of native chickens and hogs, and raising of ruminants. To date, we already completed 15 batches of trainings,” she proudly said.

Currently, Marilou is in the process of applying for Egay’s Farm to become a School for Practical Agriculture (SPA), also through the aid of ATI, DA, TESDA, Office of the Provincial Veterinarian, and Office of the Provincial Agriculturist of Region VII.

“I am so thankful for the opportunities these agencies have given me. In some ways, I am happy to at least be able to help other people, especially those displaced by the COVID-19 pandemic, to be

productive, earn a little, and even learn something on the farm,” she says.

ORGANIC AGRICULTURE CONTINUES

Egay’s Farm is growing an abundance of vegetables like lettuce, kangkong, alugbati, batao, sitao, and okra, and a number of farm animals, the most recent being ducks. The farm is also now doing vermicompost using African nightcrawlers, which is an essential aspect of organic agriculture practice, as it replaces synthetic fertilizers in enhancing the growth of crops.

A part of Egay’s Farm is allotted for vermiculture to produce the all-natural compost used to fertilize organic farms.

Marilou is also currently coordinating with other agencies like the Department of Science and Technology (DOST) to help them with the packing of the ornamentals-based juices, as well as the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) to assist with their application for ecotourism and farm tourism accreditation.

Indeed, a lot more is being planned at Egay’s Farm as Marilou continues further her passion for growing crops and animals with the purpose of feeding people the organic way.

Lastly, as organic food becomes more in demand today, she hopes that the youth would engage in similar efforts aiming towards a sustainable system of food production in the future.

“Years from now I hope that there will be more students who will study organic agriculture and farming,” she said.

Marilou at various locations of her farm, showing the beauty and the work that goes into it.



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FROM BUKIDNON

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OF THE PHILIPPINE COFFEE INDUSTRY

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