

Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers

Entrepreneurs and Employees Learn Practical Food Safety Methods

Food processing companies in Roxas City have learned how to spot and fix problem areas in their plants, thanks to this volunteer.

Many tourists in the Philippines snap photos of the country's centuries-old churches, beautiful beaches, and striking sunsets. Naoko Miura, 30, is an exception. She takes pictures of grease-caked oven tops, dusty window screens, and ceilings with paint peeling off in unsightly flakes.

Miura is a member of Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers; she is a food safety expert. She worked at a chicken processing company in Japan for three years, providing hygiene guidance to employees and supervising quality control.

To her trained eye, dirty oven tops, windows screens, and ceilings are potential food safety hazards. "Grease, dust, and paint may contaminate food products," she tells the entrepreneurs and employees of the food processing companies in Roxas City in the province of Capiz.

Miura has been teaching practical food safety methods to five of these companies since April 2009. One of her clients, Cakes, Eat Cetera, is a bakeshop that is the sole supplier of baked goods to two Jollibee restaurants and a Greenwich restaurant in Roxas. Both Jollibee and Greenwich are popular fast-food chains in the Philippines.

Proprietor Alan Encabo says, "I learned the importance of a systematic approach to quality management from Naoko." Miura took photos of the problem areas, such as liquid soap containers that are far from washing areas at the bakeshop

Alan Encabo (left), proprietor of Cakes, Eat Cetera, is grateful for the expertise Naoko Miura shared with him and his employees. "She pointed out areas that we did not realize were food safety hazards," he says.



Sotera Ibabao (right) is the founder of Progressive Women's Agrarian Reform Beneficiaries Multipurpose Cooperative. The organization produces calamansi concentrate and ready-to-drink juice. "Naoko suggested ways to streamline our assembly line," she says. "As a result, we have shortened production time by two hours."

(next page) Cecilia Atizardo (left) is the production manager at Mother's Blessing International. The company exports pickled vegetables and fruit juices to the United States. "Naoko taught me the importance of personal hygiene and having clean equipment," she says.

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operation aimed at ensuring that products are consistently manufactured to a specified quality appropriate to their intended use."

"She has helped small and medium-sized enterprises improve their food safety standards," says Juvy Benliro, trade and industry development specialist, Department of Trade and Industry in Capiz. "Thus, she has helped the food processing industry in the province become more competitive in the local and global markets."

The top three food products in the province are canned smoked crabmeat, canned sardines, and pickled and preserved fruits and vegetables. In 2007, the industry exported \$10 million worth of products to the United States and sold 10 million pesos worth of food products locally.

Encabo is saddened that Miura will return to Japan in March 2011. "I consider myself lucky to have had a specialist like Naoko at my company," he says. "She provided an expert's perspective."

For her part, Miura is pleased that she has been of service to entrepreneurs like Encabo during her two-year stint. When asked what accomplishments, professional and personal, she was most proud of, she replies, "One of my clients has improved his plant by my recommendation, and I understand culture in the Philippines and love it."

While Miura will miss her friends and native Filipino dishes, her photographs will always remind her that she has effectively shared her knowledge with Filipinos who are grateful for her assistance.

PARTNERSHIP WITH NGO

Profiting from Ecological Balance

A project brings back ecological balance and provides incomes to the poor coastal community of Balarang in Silay City. The next step: a program that will achieve the same results in a mountain setting.

The barangay of Balarang in Silay City is synonymous with fresh seafood. Many customers feast on the shellfish and sea fish served at seven restaurants in the area. Fisher folk earn a lot from the abundant mud crabs and oysters.

Tourists flock to the Balarang Coastal Ecotourism Area. There, they enjoy walking on the 700-meter bamboo footbridge, watching the herons and egrets, and planting mangroves.

It's hard to believe that just a few years ago, the residents of Balarang were in dire straits. Years of cutting mangroves for firewood and converting mangrove swamps into fishponds had harmed the marine life in the area. By the mid-1990s, their livelihoods as fishermen were threatened.

Ikaw Ako Japan Negros Partnership for Environmental Protection (Ikaw Ako) lent a helping hand to the poor community. The Japanese non-government organization (NGO) established the Balarang Coastal Ecotourism Area in 1997. In that year, Ikaw Ako started planting mangroves in the area to revive the mangrove swamps.

Mangrove swamps play an important role in the environment. "They serve as nurseries for fish and shellfish," says Mari Kurata, a forester and coordinator of Ikaw Ako. "Mangroves provide food for many marine species. Their tangled roots protect the shores from erosion, and they provide shelter for many animals." The NGO has reforested more than 20 hectares of mangrove swamps in Negros Island.

