



# From seed to shelf: Training farmers as entrepreneurs

Melita Savera woke up at dawn – not to get a head start with a plow nor plant seedlings. Rather, she is on her way to a shopping mall in Lipa, Batangas few hours away from her farm in Gumaca, Quezon to sell her produce: bottled preserved vegetables, organic fertilizers, and vegetable noodles.

She is no longer merely an agricultural worker, she is also an entrepreneur.

Since 2009, the Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR) and the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) have been training farmer beneficiaries of the Philippine Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP) in communities in Negros and Quezon to become entrepreneurs. Under the training, close to 400 sugarcane and coconut farmers have come to develop their knowledge and skills on business development, learn what it takes to make a small diversified farm work, and explore the market potentials of the products they produce.

“We are training coconut farmers to encourage them to diversify their sources of income by opening their eyes to the market opportunities for other coco-based products, new technologies locally available in improving their farm yield, and adding value to their products,” said Ma. Marcy Ballesteros, chief of staff of the support services office of DAR and project manager of the JICA-DAR

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“The training on the value chain approach aims to enable the farmers see the bigger picture and deepen their knowledge of the coconut industry as well as enable them become active players in the industry and strategize as groups of organized entrepreneurs on how they can increase their benefits from the value chain,” Ballesteros added.

At the farmers training held in Quezon, coconut farmer Rodelo Cruzat said, “Before, we only knew of copra trading, but through the seminar we learned that we can still earn from selling coco coir.”

Part of the training’s module is visits to successful agricultural entrepreneurs to better understand agri-business operations, product development, and marketing.

Mariano Sason, an exporter of coco coir (natural fibers from coconut husks used as mattresses) said, “It is important that we teach our farmers to also utilize trash and turn them into cash.”

Ordinary farmers like Cruzat used to have zero idea that coco coir can be an enterprise. “*Tinatapon lang namin. Pwede pala pagkakitaan,*” he said. (We used to throw them away. We learned we can make money by also selling them.)

Cruzat is also vice chairman of Village Savings Credit Association in Guinayangan, Quezon. Their cooperative has 153 farmer members and he said, “*Ibabahagi namin sa kanila ang mga bago naming kaalaman sa training.*” (We shall impart to other members of our cooperatives the learning we acquired from this training.)



Quezon Province has about 54,075 hectares of coconut farm lands with close to 15,000 farmers, data from DAR showed. For a province whose main income come from farming, learning the ropes of getting into business and diversifying their products come as welcome news.

A typical coconut farmer who tills one hectare of land could earn P15,000.00 (fifteen thousand pesos) a month with selling copra. But then again, this would depend on how much the market dictates the copra price. For farmers with families, the amount is meager if one thinks of sending several children to school and then putting food on the table.

“The training program likewise synergizes the efforts of the different government agencies by equipping small farmers with useful technology and knowledge of markets and with skills to organize themselves into business units and consolidate their production, processing and marketing activities,” Ballesteros further added.

“*Napakalaki ng naitulong sa amin ng training. Natuto kami ng business planning at iba ibang paraan na madagdagan ang kita mula sa niyog* (The training helped us a lot. We learned business planning and the many ways to earn money from coconut),” explained Anthony Adiaton, manager of the Farmers Club Multi-Purpose Cooperative in San Francisco, Quezon.



**Farmers like Melita Savera are trained on becoming competent entrepreneurs**

He said now farmers in their community would line up the coco coir for sale along the streets of their village and earn extra P600.00 (six hundred pesos) from it. “*Plano naming magtayo ng warehouse hindi lang para sa copra kundi pati sa coco coir.*” (Our plan is to put up a warehouse not just for copra but for coco coir.)

“Our farmers have seen the entire value chain perspective and they now understand how they can explore the market with their products and benefit from it,” said Elizabeth Villapando, provincial agrarian reform officer of DAR Quezon.

The Philippine coconut industry began in the 18th century during the Spanish Galleon trade, according to the Philippine Coconut Authority (PCA). World market’s interest in Philippine coconut products was fueled by demand from markets such as the US for copra and coconut oil. The Philippines is also among the world’s largest producers of coconut products.

Literally, decades ago, one would turn around a typical plot of agricultural land in the Philippines and spot a farmer. Today, in that same spot of land, equipped with business mindset and skills, someone’s also an entrepreneur.

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-Anthony Adiaton, farmer**