

WHERE THE GRASS IS GREENER:

MYANMAR AGRICULTURAL RESEARCHERS LEARN LESSONS FROM PHILIPPINE BUFFALO FARMING



The powerful cyclone that hit Myanmar in 2008 left extensive damage to the country's people and livestock.

Buffaloes are a common sight in Myanmar's agricultural scene and are used for draught purposes and for milk source. When the cyclone hit, almost 100,000 buffaloes died.

At the buffalo farm in the idyllic town of San Ildefonso, Magalang, Pampanga, Dr. Mi Mi Thaw, a research officer for livestock breeding in Myanmar's Veterinary Department finds hope. Dr. Mi Mi Thaw and nine other trainees from Myanmar are part of the Third Country Training Program on Buffalo Production of the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and the Philippine Carabao Center (PCC).

"Our training in the Philippines will help us improve buffalo farming and population in Myanmar," said Dr. Mi Mi Thaw.

That morning amid the same rustic scenes in Magalang, Pampanga, Dr. Mi Mi Thaw has just finished performing a pregnancy diagnosis of one of the buffaloes in the farm. "We hope to transfer the knowledge we learned here to other veterinarians and farmers in Myanmar."

Dr. Hnin Yi Soe, associate professor of the University of Veterinary Science in Myanmar said, "We want to teach our students and colleagues what we learn on buffalo production."

At the university where she teaches, 1,500 students are learning livestock-raising, among other things.

In the Philippines, Pampanga is one of the regions identified by the PCC in their buffalo upgrading program. Buffaloes from these farms are given artificial insemination to boost buffalo production and the town's dairy industry. Several years ago, JICA assisted the Philippine government in improving buffalo and cattle productivity through artificial insemination programs and technical training. Technicians from the PCC benefited from the training and are now transferring their knowledge to the trainees from Myanmar.

Beyond the vast green farmlands in Pampanga, farmers are also benefiting from the artificial insemination program of the PCC.

Mr. Andy Poe Gracia, 43 years old and a farmer said, "*Iba rin po yung produkto ng artificial insemination. Mas malalaki yung kalabaw, mas madaming gatas na nakukuha sa kanila, mas matibay sila na magtrabaho sa init ng araw, at madaling ibenta.*" (Buffaloes that are products of artificial insemination are different. They are bigger and heavier, produce plenty of milk, stronger workers, and easy to sell.)

He said that the 60-70 peso per liter of carabao's milk has helped farmers like him diversify their income from the farm traditionally utilized for rice and vegetable planting. Mang Andy now has 26 carabaos and is able to send his 4 children successfully to schools.

Farhana Manlapaz, 42, a farmer's wife said, "*Nag-organisa na kami ng cooperative para magbenta ng gatas ng kalabaw. Dati kaming mga asawa ng farmers, wala talaga kaming kita pero ngayon kahit papaano meron na.*" (We organized ourselves into a cooperative to process and sell buffalo milk. Farmers' wives have no source of income before but now, we have an extra income).

PCC is the government agency in the Philippines that implements programs for the country's rural farming communities. "Training programs on artificial insemination is one of the many programs we offer our clients. We want to improve the genetic make-up of our native carabaos so they will be a source of milk," explained Dr. Liza Battad, Planning Officer of the Carabao Center.

"Despite the challenges of industrialization, our agro industries are here to stay. It is not always that an industry can say that there is a machine that when you feed grass, will give you milk. Only buffaloes can do that," Dr. Battad added.

Down south at the PCC at the University of the Philippines in Los Banos, Laguna, the Myanmar trainees were taken to a PCC research farm where they were given practical training on artificial insemination for buffaloes.

"Our lessons will help us teach Myanmar farmers how to breed buffaloes," said Dr. Mi Mi Thaw.

The buffalo production training spans two months, but this early, it seemed that the Myanmar agricultural workers and researchers have found enduring lessons: hope can be regained in buffalo farming in Myanmar.

"Our training in the Philippines will help us improve buffalo farming and population in Myanmar"

-Dr. Mi Mi Thaw, Third Country Training participant



Knowledge on artificial insemination is shared by Filipino technicians to Myanmar trainees