

Winners

Women in New and Expanded Roles
in Philippine Agriculture and Fisheries



A project of the Philippine Department of Agriculture
Gender and Development (DA-GAD) Focal System
supported by the Food and Agriculture Organization
of the United Nations

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Dedication

For all the rural women who play a major role in feeding the world;

For all the Filipino women who contribute to development, specially those who have struggled and transcended the traditional roles expected of them and won better life for themselves, their families and their communities; and

For the Department of Agriculture Gender and Development (DA-GAD) Focal System coordinators and members who serve as catalysts in the quest for equality and true partnership for development among men and women.

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Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

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Ms. Jindra Linda L. Demeterio

Officer-in-Charge, Regional Executive Director

Department of Agriculture-Regional Field Unit VI

Dedication

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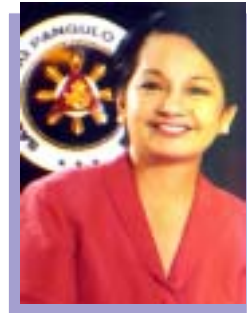
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Malacañan Palace
Manila

Foreword

Our government recognizes that much needs to be done to fully realize gender equality and women empowerment in Philippine society. We are addressing this by providing more avenues for women participation, promoting equal rights protection and ensuring the provision of gender-responsive services in health, livelihood and education. Our efforts are guided by the long-term Philippine Plan for Gender-Responsive Development and the medium Framework Plan for Women.



Our 10-point agenda for socio-economic and political reforms and the Medium-Term Philippine Development Plan also emphasize women empowerment as an approach to fighting poverty. We have especially targeted women beneficiaries for our microfinancing and livelihood programs aimed to generate 1.5 million jobs a year. Our health and food supplemental programs in rural communities seek to address the nutritional needs of women and their children.

These and other various efforts are encouraged by the fact that Filipino women are strong, courageous and persevering. We are optimistic that with our participative and empowered women, we shall soon become a progressive society characterized by equal rights and gender sensitivity.

This book illustrates the strength, creativity and courage of our womenfolk. In them, we will find that, very much like our nation today, the Filipino rural woman has time and again risen up to triumph in the face of seemingly insurmountable odds.

Their stories inspire, provoke through and, ultimately, bring hope to all of us. Perhaps more importantly, they demonstrate how much the Filipina can offer the nation's future.

It is my hope that this book will bolster a common faith in the Filipina's capacities for the same achievement and recognition allowed her father, brother, husband or son.

Mabuhay ang Pilipinas!

GLORIA MACAPAGAL-ARROYO



Republic of the Philippines
DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Office of the Secretary

Foreword

For the greater part of this nation's history, women have been compelled to claim a subordinate position to men. This is still the dominant attitude and trend, but it is in the process of being abandoned.

The slow pace of this change, nonetheless, is far from encouraging — particularly in the countryside, where women are largely excluded from meaningful participation in the agricultural economy at the grassroots level.

Although women make considerable contributions to agricultural productivity, they remain “invisible” farmers. Uplifting their socio-economic status and providing them similar opportunities as their male counterparts are thus a matter of special concern for the Department of Agriculture, more particularly through the Gender and Development Focal System.

For instance, around two million women are involved in various agricultural, fishery and other rural enterprises throughout the archipelago, but only two out of ten earn regular wages and, those who do, receive lower pay than men for similar work done, and the rest remain unpaid family farm workers. Further, they have limited access to land ownership and land use, and they often encounter difficulties in securing loans from banks and other financial institutions.

Yet our rural womenfolk remain wonderfully patient. The stories in this book — graciously sponsored by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations — show that they have not only endured, but they have in fact conquered. It is as Dr. Jose Rizal had described: “The Filipino woman no longer bows her head and bends her knees. Her hope in the future is revived.”

As Secretary of Agriculture, I stand squarely behind all efforts to uphold the rights of our nation's women, to recognize their achievements, and free them of the restrictions imposed by their now obsolete traditional roles.

I believe that only in allowing our rural womenfolk a larger share of the resources necessary to attain prosperity can we finally realize the fullest potential of our agriculture sector, and thus ensure for future generations a stronger, more prosperous and progressive republic.

Mabuhay ang ating mga kababaihan!



DOMINGO F. PANGANIBAN
Secretary



**FOOD AND AGRICULTURE
ORGANIZATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS**

Foreword

FAO champions women's contributions to food production and food security, and spearheads efforts to remove barriers that limit women's opportunities and their full enjoyment of their rights. We believe that the battle for food security can be won only if the invaluable contribution made by women is recognized and if social, political and economic context empowers them to develop their potential as farmers, actors of development and human beings. These ideals are embodied in FAO's Gender and Development Plan of Action for the years 2002-2007, enacted as a way to energize and coordinate analysis and action for the benefit of both women and men.



When taken into account by rural planners and policy-makers, women can produce tangible and sustainable improvements in the quality of rural life at the household, community and national levels. Therefore, agricultural planning should make full use of existing human resources, in particular rural men and women. Only then will there be a chance of achieving sustainable agricultural development, with the aim of increasing productivity and overall production, securing the preservation of natural resources, increased incomes, new jobs, improvement in levels of household food security and adequate levels of nutrition.

I would like to acknowledge the initiatives and programmes of the Philippine Government that continuously provide Filipino women who are among those at the top ranks of the world's food producers, a voice in matters that concern their household's livelihood, and ensure that these women do not remain a minority in decision-making spheres.

As a major partner in the Philippines, FAO is committed to working with and supporting these and other programmes of the Department of Agriculture to speed up efforts for empowerment of rural women and farmers, and for promotion of gender equality in agriculture and rural development for the benefit of all mankind.


RAMESH C.A. JAIN
FAO Representative

Preface

During the years I co-chaired the Department of Agriculture Gender and Development (DA-GAD) Focal System from 2001 – 2005, I and fellow members were only too aware that women in agriculture and fisheries were taking on new, more expansive, and certainly, more important roles in development.



Their achievements and contributions to development, both at the local and national levels, however, went largely unheralded and unacknowledged because they were undocumented.

Yet, their stories inspire, and are potential models for how women — and men — should play out their roles in making a difference in themselves, in their family, and in their community.

Three years ago, in response to this aching need for documenting women-in-development stories, we members embarked on a “*Search for Outstanding Rural Woman-Achievers.*” The Search, which is now conducted annually, aims to identify, document and recognize extraordinary achievements in personal and community development attained by rural women.

As expected, the Search yielded a rich harvest of individual experiences that have had impact on host communities and in the general realm of development. It has since become an annual undertaking, which always culminated in women achievers getting recognized and given awards during “*Rural Women’s Day*” on the 15 of October.

This book, which is supported by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), is a documentation of some of the success stories identified through the Search. It also includes stories of women that have made positive, and more importantly significant, impacts on fellow ruralfolk and their communities.

Aptly entitled ***WINNERS: Women in New and Expanded Roles in Philippine Agriculture and Fisheries***, the book relates the saga of women who have charted social and economic paths different from those traditionally laid before them.

Among the inspiring stories are:

- ❖ An innovative entrepreneur who developed a non-traditional export out of *chichacorn*;
- ❖ A widow who developed further the farm left by her husband and anchored the dream of her town to become a fruit and processed fruit exporter, even as she actively engaged the local government unit as an active member of civil society;
- ❖ A livestock extensionist who almost single-handedly built up the large ruminant industry, particularly dairy cattle, in her hometown;
- ❖ A former nun who expanded her apostolate toward scientific integrated farming and community development and went on to win honors from the FAO;
- ❖ A business graduate whose serious disability did not deter her from engaging other women and others similarly situated as she in profitable enterprises;
- ❖ A trailblazing scientist who breached the glass ceiling of the bureaucracy by becoming the first woman regional director of the DA; and
- ❖ The wife who proved to be an equal partner of her husband in a thriving seaweed farm.

A common thread that runs through these stories is their productive engagement with the DA, which apparently contributed in no small measure to their respective feats in agri-fishery production, honing their entrepreneurial skills, and active involvement in community development.

This small book is by no means the definitive account of the best experiences that the women in Philippine agriculture and fisheries offer. For sure, there are many more exciting and inspiring stories out there that should be told. That is the reason we hope this book shall be only the first in a series on the subject.

In the meantime, we toast the remarkable women and their experiences that are contained in this book and the many others whose stories are still waiting to be written. They all exemplify the fact that women have distinctive and vital roles to play in countryside and national development. May their tribe increase!

Jindra L. Demeterio

JINDRA LINDA L. DEMETERIO

OIC, Regional Executive Director

DA-RFU VI



Virginia Diot Muniño

Barangay Sta. Cruz, Tampakan, South Cotabato

Charismatic farmer

She mixes faith and science in her integrated farm, and has won honors from FAO

During the 2003 World Food Day celebration, Virginia D. Muniño, or Virgie as she is called by relatives, friends and town mates, brought honor to herself and the Philippines when she was cited for her outstanding accomplishment in integrated farming by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). She received the prestigious award at the FAO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific in Bangkok, Thailand, from no less than Her Royal Highness, Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn of the Thai Royal Family.

To be recognized by a world body and vested the high honor makes the lady genuinely remarkable. Her personal journey toward, or perhaps, alongside, this important feat makes her far more so.

For the FAO Search, Virgie was chosen by the Philippine Department of Agriculture Gender and Development (DA-GAD) Focal System from among regional nominees.

She was recognized for her outstanding achievement as a farmer adopting an integrated farming system in her 2.5-hectare farm, which she ably managed and cultivated to produce various crops, animals and fish, employing sustainable

agricultural technologies such as organic farming and integrated pest management.

Virgie's farm records show that she efficiently farmed hybrid corn, coconut, cardava and *lakatan* bananas, rambutan, durian, and assorted vegetables like eggplant, spring and bulb onions, string beans, *alugbati* (Malabar spinach), ampalaya (bitter gourd), *upo* (gourd), *malunggay* (moringa), *okra* (gumbo), bell pepper, green pepper, ginger, radish, tomatoes and *patola* (angled luffa). She also raised poultry, swine, and fish (catfish and tilapia).

She also maintained forest trees like bagras, bamboo and mahogany; a fruit tree nursery composed of durian, mango, calamansi, rambutan and lanzones; and planted root crops such as *ubi* (yam), *camote* (sweet potato), *gabi* (taro), cassava and *tam-is* or apali.

In all, during the year prior to the FAO search, Virgie realized a gross income of P180,000 (roughly \$3,600) from cash crops alone.

Her feat — of being declared as one of the country's model farmers — was even more remarkable, considering that she did not even dream or plan to be a farmer.

She was formerly a Catholic nun, known as Sister Virgie, belonging to the Oblates of Notre Dame congregation, where she spent 17 years of her life. In 1994, she was forced to leave the convent when her aged father got sick.

With no one to help her similarly aged mother, as all her siblings were already married and had families of their own, Sister Virgie asked her superiors for a three-year leave of absence.

Back at home, Sister Virgie took care not only of her sick father, but also exerted painstaking efforts to reclaim their neglected 14-hectare farm and nurture it back to productivity. Her father used the land as a bond for an acquaintance accused of murder.

Reclaiming the farm's Transfer of Certificate of Title (TCT), however, proved to be a tedious process, which took more than two years. With the long



wait, coupled with her commitment to continue taking care of her parents, Sister Virgie made the difficult decision to abandon her religious vocation and leave the convent permanently in 1994. Thereafter, she buckled down to work as a farmer, gradually improving the farm's operations, which started to realize modest returns.

With enough savings, she was able to reimburse the P15,000-cash bond and reclaimed the farm's TCT. From then on, she took full control and management of the farm.

In 1998, her father passed away. With her mother's consent, she subdivided the 14-hectare farm among

her siblings. Virgie — the fourth in a brood of seven, consisting of three boys and four girls — retained for herself 2.5 hectares, which she gradually developed into an integrated farm.

Actually, becoming a farmer was not strange to Virgie, as during her 17-year stay in the convent she was also assigned to do farm chores. More importantly, she attended a six-month training on sustainable agriculture and community development at the South East Asia Rural Social Leadership Institute (SEARSOLIN), Xavier University, a Jesuit-run school, in Cagayan de Oro City. She was among an international mix of participants.

A challenge for Virgie was financing her various plans to fully harness the potentials of the farm. So, she patiently saved and regularly ploughed the income back to gradually develop the 2.5-hectare farm. She recalled that the farm input assistance (seedlings, fertilizers and chemicals) extended by the Department of Agriculture also helped her a lot.

She credits her success to her religious adherence to “charism,” a concept that considers one's predisposition or choices as a gift from God. She said:

“You can never succeed in anything, specially farming, if you do not enjoy the activity. You should engage the Holy Spirit in doing things you do.”

Moreover, Virgie never stopped with her previous calling at the Oblates of Notre Dame, as she continued to engage in socio-civic activities that were consistent with and formed part of the congregation’s mission.

Firstly, she became active in the activities of the Rural Improvement Club (RIC), heading the Municipality of Tampakan RIC at one time, and serving as secretary of the South Cotabato Provincial Federation of RICs. During her stint, she reactivated the Tampakan RIC and its adjunct cooperative, by conducting training on basket-weaving and other cottage industries, as sources of income and livelihood for womenfolk and their families.

She also initiated the formation of the RIC in her own barangay (village), Sta. Cruz. To entice greater participation, she convinced the barangay and municipal RIC officers and members to hold a regular province-wide “RIC Achievement Day.”

Secondly, she headed the Tampakan Federation of Women’s Associations, where she trained members and non-members alike in values formation. The Federation was organized under the auspices of the Department of Social Work and Development.

Thirdly, she served as provincial federation president of *Gabriela* — an all-women, nationalist, cause-oriented group, and now a Party List at the Philippines’ House of Representatives. Gabriela was named after a Filipino heroine, Gabriela Silang, who along with her husband Diego led a revolt against the Spanish colonizers in the 1760’s.

As a respected and acknowledged community leader, she was elected chairperson of then Sitio Sta. Cruz. During her term, she spearheaded the eventual conversion of Sta. Cruz into a full-fledged barangay in 2000. Since then, their village had its own set of political leaders (chairperson and council members), and the legal personality and authority to generate and manage funds, particularly its Internal Revenue Allotment or share of income, business and real estate taxes and fees. She also served as a volunteer of the Municipal Cooperative Trainers Team that provides formal and informal training to farmers in Tampakan. Expectedly, she remains active in the Parish Pastoral Council, where she served at various times as treasurer or secretary.

She also hosts stay-in training or visits to her farm by farmer-groups from Tampakan or other areas in SOCCSKSARGEN or Region 12, composed of the four provinces of South Cotabato, Cotabato, Sultan Kudarat and Sarangani, and General Santos City.

In her individual capacity, she has continued to provide socio-economic assistance to a community of Muslims in Dulawan and Datu Piang towns, an apostolate she had continued when she was still a member of the Oblates of Notre Dame congregation.

In her own way, Virgie tries to solve a debilitating attitude among Filipinos, the “dole-out mentality,” which most of the time is extremely abused. Even in her community, some would come and ask for free vegetables. To solve this problem, Virgie said, “we need to teach and empower the lazy and the underprivileged among us, and teach them to be conscientious or engage in productive work.”

She said such transformation would succeed through constant dialogue and sustained mentoring on the value of self-help, industry and hard work — which she invariably does during casual conversations with fellow farmers, town mates and visitors.

Virgie continues to improve and develop a portion of the farm planted to coconut. In 2003, she installed a shallow tube well and pump that draw out groundwater to irrigate the farm, and a “kukum” copra dryer, all with the assistance from the DA’s Philippine Coconut Authority (PCA).



She is also into processing, which is a major activity of RIC. These include: *ubi* and *gabi* into taro chips (garlic and sweetened) and powder, at 100 kilos per week; 1,000 kilos of banana chips per week; and dehydrated papaya and pineapple, at 50 kilos per

week. These are sold in Tampakan and other markets in the region, particularly in General Santos City.

She also had the opportunity to introduce her banana chips in the United States, during the Washington DC National Product Expo East at the Washington Convention Center, in September 2005. The exposure was made with the assistance of the Peace and Equity Foundation, Inc., which carried Virgie's products in its promotional brochure and brought samples of her products to the fair venue.

She and fellow RIC members sell their products under the name *TRICE Food Products*, which stands for Tampakan RIC Entrepreneur.

Virgie plans to embark on full-scale processing by putting up her own facility. Currently, she pays an RIC colleague, Ms. Virginia Motril, for the use of her processing plant, for up to 10 per cent of the value of the finished product. She estimates that she would need about P500,000 (\$10,000) to build her own processing plant.

“We need to diversify into processing, because during peak season the market cannot absorb all the fresh harvest. Thus, a lot of our fruit and crop products simply spoil and go to waste,” Virgie lamented.

Most of Virgie's friends, relatives and clients all agree that she was destined to be a successful farmer-entrepreneur, and most probably it is the will of God. It runs in her genes, inherited from her late farmer-father and a business-minded mother, who used to engage in dried fish trading, which was once the biggest in South Cotabato and attracted buyers from as far as Iloilo, in the Visayas.

Virgie has been generous, as well to her siblings. She financed the college education of her two older siblings, and the three younger than her. (*SHC*)



Victoria Agustin Motril

Tupi, South Cotabato

Food market explorer

She tirelessly explores markets for fresh and processed food products

Born in 1950, the second in a brood of six girls and a boy, to a farmer-father and a housekeeping mother, Victoria or Vicky developed interest in farming at an early age. Out of sheer fun and curiosity, she frequently tagged along with a group of agrarian reform technologists visiting the farms in their barangay (village) in Tupi, South Cotabato.

Thus, after finishing an education degree major in Home Economics at Silliman University, in Dumaguete City, Negros Oriental, she joined the Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR) as a technologist. There, she developed a deeper passion for agriculture. It was also at DAR where she met her future husband Teodoro or Teddy, a fellow technologist.

Early on, Vicky believed that farming could adequately provide for the needs of her family, other farmers and ruralfolk. But with their meager salaries as government workers, Vicky and Teddy could not possibly realize their dream of owning a farm and engaging in a profitable agribusiness enterprise. Further, they wanted to resolve a lingering question at the back of their minds: “How could we help other people, when we ourselves needed help?”

And so, they did in 1984. They quit their jobs and worked overseas, leaving behind three children — Hazel Joy, Helen Grace and Francis — in the care of Vicky's mother and sister.

Vicky worked for two years as a dietary assistant at a Maternity and Children's Hospital in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia; and four years in Greece as a caregiver to a boy, whose mother she met in the Saudi Arabian hospital. Teddy followed a year later and worked as a seaman for the same Saudi employer of Vicky.

They stayed overseas for six years and returned home for good in 1990.

With their combined savings, they realized their dream — owning a five-hectare farm. Initially, they planted corn and then eggplant, learning valuable lessons along the way.

Vicky recalled that their first harvest of eggplant was a flop. To their dismay, there were very few takers, as the variety they planted had a very short shelf-life, drying up and shrinking easily. So the next planting season, they used a better variety that buyers also preferred.

They also planted cabbage, but at harvest time, the rains came and destroyed the entire crop. They learned their second lesson that crops have specific planting and harvesting calendar.

Fearing another failure, they sought assistance from technicians of the Department of Agriculture and private agribusiness companies. From then on, Vicky and Teddy employed the recommended package of technologies. And soon, their farm venture started to prosper.

Vicky recalled that one of their initial successes was when they produced a bountiful harvest of quality bell pepper, which was all sold to an agribusiness firm, RFM Corporation. Encouraged, they raised other vegetables like cauliflower, and root crops like *camote* (sweet potato).

They also planted a portion of their five-hectare farm to several fruit trees, which proved later to be another successful venture. They started with *guapple* (big guavas the size of apples), followed by mangosteen, and then solo papaya.

As president of the RIC Federation, which she held since 2001, Vicky has reactivated the RICs in seven of the total 15 barangays in Tupi.

Further, as chairperson of the MAFC, Vicky has initiated the formulation of a municipal agricultural profile, which required among other tasks a survey of all fruit trees in town. And she has convinced the Municipal Government to fund the initiative, which provided summer jobs to 20 students who conducted the survey.

Vicky said the municipal profile would help convince investors that Tupi farmers have the capacity to produce what they commit, particularly regarding the fruit industry — as they know the total number of specific fruits trees, their respective location, their age, and if they are productive or not. For instance, Vicky said they can boast that they have currently 4,600 fruit-bearing mangosteen trees in Tupi.

As an acknowledged and respected community leader, Vicky was also enlisted as a member of the town's monitoring team on jueteng (an illegal numbers game) and other forms of illegal gambling and illegal drug trade, and the Municipal Waste Management Council. She also serves as a volunteer for the General Santos City Habitat for Humanity, Inc.

Because of her efforts and achievements, the Municipal Government of Tupi in 2003 has cited Vicky as a “*Distinguished Advocate of Women's Welfare.*”

All told, Vicky said she has no regrets serving as a community worker and in involving herself in numerous socio-economic organizations. She is happy and fulfilled, despite the fact that such activities are a financial drain.

Vicky attributes the success of her integrated farm, the export and processing ventures, as well as her several socio-civic groups to the sustained support of various government agencies, NGOs, and the private sector.

And her family, since she lost husband Teddy, has been her inspiration, especially their three children. Eldest Hazel Joy, 27, is now a teacher. Helen Grace, 24, has finished business administration and pursuing a law degree at the Ateneo de Davao University. And the youngest, Francis, is a senior in Accountancy. (*SHC*)



Expectedly, traders, and development workers in South Cotabato and nearby provinces took notice of their thriving multi-storey farm.

So not before long, in 1999 or barely a decade of farming, Teddy was declared the region's "*Most Outstanding High Value Commercial Crop Farmer*," under the *Gawad Saka*, an annual search for achievers in agriculture and fisheries sponsored by the Department of Agriculture. It is a multi-level competition, featuring several categories, whereby municipal winners vie for the best in the

province, and then the provincial winners vie for the best in the region. Finally, the national winner is chosen from the regional winners.

Teddy's ascent started when he won the municipal (Tupi) contest and then bested other contenders to clinch the provincial (South Cotabato) award. Finally, he topped other nominees in SOCCSKSARGEN (South Cotabato, Cotabato, Sultan Kudarat, Sarangani, and General Santos City).

A year later, when the couple was busy treading the success trail, Vicky lost Teddy to an untimely and unfortunate crime. While deeply saddened, she chose not to wallow in self-pity.

Alone, Vicky stood her ground and continued nurturing their dream, expanding their agribusiness farm enterprise, and vastly improving it.

With help from the agricultural technicians, she improved the lay-out of their five-hectare farm in a more scientific manner. She also intensified the use of organic farming techniques.

The redesigned farm was planted to hybrid corn, several vegetables (asparagus, bell pepper and cauliflower), fruit trees (papaya, mangosteen,

durian, rambutan, lanzones, guapple, and kalamansi), and watermelon underneath the trees. She also integrated poultry and piggery pens, and a fishpond, where three farmhands serve as able assistants.

She has continued their fresh and processed fruit contract arrangements with several companies, which included: TropiFresh, a division of Dole Philippines, Inc.; Marsman-Drysdale; and Alter-Trade Philippines, Inc., among other Filipino and foreign buyers.

In 2003, Vicky's turn to be recognized came. She placed second as the "Most Outstanding Filipina Farmer, Adopting an Integrated Farming System," under a contest sponsored by the Department of Agriculture Gender and Development (DA-GAD) Focal System in celebration of "Rural Womens Day." She was also cited for her exceptional entrepreneurial qualities, which enabled her to maximize the production and income of her five-hectare farm, and for being an active community socio-civic leader, and contributing to the furtherance of the agricultural sector in Tupi and South Cotabato.

While she devotes most of her waking hours to her growing agribusiness enterprise, Vicky still allots a few hours to several socio-civic organizations.

These include the Tupi Rural Improvement Club (RIC) and South Cotabato Provincial Federation of RICs, where she has served as president. She was also elected chairperson of the Tupi Municipal Agricultural and Fishery Council (MAFC), giving her an automatic membership at the Municipal Development

Council — a multi-sectoral body that recommends programs, policies and budget of the Municipal Government of Tupi.



She likewise resumed her short-lived career as a technologist by serving as a volunteer trainor. With her knowledge and skills in meat processing, she became a sought-after speaker in

livelihood training seminars. Soon, the topic of her talks expanded to include processing of other farm products.

Today, Vicky produces and sells several commodities, carrying their brand name, *VMotril's Food Products*, to domestic and export markets. Those being exported include: fresh “bongolan” banana, to Japan, through Alter-Trade, Inc.; fresh asparagus spears, also to Japan, through Dole’s TropiFresh; and steamed and frozen sweet, violet *camote*, to South Korea.

Fresh and processed products for the domestic market include corn cobs, cauliflower, bell pepper, mangosteen, rambutan, lanzones, *bongolan* banana chips, pickled papaya *achara*, *gabi* chips, and dehydrated pineapple and papaya.

Vicky continues to explore the export market with the help of non-government organizations, like the Growth with Equity in Mindanao (GEM), a USAID-financed program, and Alter-Trade, Inc., and by participating in various trade fairs in Mindanao and Manila.

She is eyeing Korea for her dried papaya and banana chips. Mitsui Corporation in Japan is also interested in organic banana chips. GEM has assured her of help in exploring the Chinese market, where she has had initial engagement through her partnership with Marsman-Drysdale.

To sustain her growing processed fruit and vegetable venture, including those of her colleagues in South Cotabato, Vicky has spearheaded the establishment of the Tupi Food Laboratory and Training Center. The facility aims to impart food processing technologies among newcomers, and develop new and innovative products for both domestic and export markets.

The Center is a joint project of the municipal government and the Federation of RICs in Tupi, and financed under the Livelihood Enhancement for Agricultural Development (LEAD) program of the DA through its National Agricultural and Fishery Council (NAFC). The Department of Science and Technology also provided a grant in the form of processing equipment.

Completed in June 2005, the Center has already conducted a number of training courses on fruit dehydration, fish drying, virgin coconut oil production, and cornhusk handicraft production. It also hosted familiarization tours for RICs and other farmers from neighboring North Cotabato.

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Vicky attributes the success of her integrated farm, the export and processing ventures, as well as her several socio-civic groups to the sustained support of various government agencies, NGOs, and the private sector.

And her family, since she lost husband Teddy, has been her inspiration, especially their three children. Eldest Hazel Joy, 27, is now a teacher. Helen Grace, 24, has finished business administration and pursuing a law degree at the Ateneo de Davao University. And the youngest, Francis, is a senior in Accountancy. (SHC)



Cristina Tumacder Sampaga

Bonfal Proper, Bayombong, Nueva Vizcaya

Community mobilizer

She champions the cause of rural women and people with disability

Cristina Tumacder Sampaga, or Tina as relatives and friends fondly call her, has faced grave physical and emotional challenges, and she survived through sheer determination.

The eldest in a brood of five (two brothers and two sisters) of Magdalena Damaso and Placido Tumacder (a marginal farmer and carpenter), Tina was born and raised in the quaint farming community of Bonfal Norte, Bayombong, Nueva Vizcaya.

Life was not easy for this typical *provinciana* (a countryside lass), who finished elementary education at Bonfal Pilot School in 1970, and high school in 1974 at St. Louis School, in Solano, Nueva Vizcaya.

Her first challenge came when she met a vehicular accident in 1978, causing her right arm to be amputated, two months before her graduation at St. Mary's College, where she was taking up Commerce major in Accounting.

Disabled and shaken emotionally, Tina bounced back and worked part-time as a librarian



at St. Mary's College, where she finally completed her accountancy studies as a scholar. After graduation, she continued to teach catechism to elementary students at the nearby St. Dominic Parish Church.

Her second challenge came when she fell in love, got pregnant and gave birth to a love child. Thus, she was forced to resign from her catechitical work. But her parents supported her all the way. She gave birth to a girl, Monina. She remained a single mother for five years, until she found love again in Jojo.

She began her expansive community work in 1992, when she enlisted as a village or barangay health worker, and more particularly as a "*Barangay Nutrition Scholar*," weighing pre-schoolers and implementing other health and nutrition activities.

That same year, she also joined the Rural Improvement Club (RIC) of Bayombong, serving as secretary, and was actively involved in community projects such as piglet dispersal, and fund raising activities like bingo socials, and "*Search for Mrs. RIC*" (locally known as "*Ginang RIC*").

Because of her work, she became popular in her village, and thus was egged on to run for public office as a council member or "*Kagawad*" of Barangay Bonfal Norte. She was elected as the No.1 *Kagawad* during the 1994 Barangay elections, and served for eight years, until 2001.

Tina is active in helping fellows with disability, having been elected as President and Project Manager of the Nueva Vizcaya Disabled Group Federation in 1997 to 2004. She was instrumental in seeking substantial support from the Provincial Government of Nueva Vizcaya, which financed several of their livelihood projects, and the establishment of the Lagoon and Children's Park.

The Federation also received financial support from other government agencies and institutions, which include: the Department of Labor and Employment, which gave P100,000 (\$2,000) as operating capital; the Department of Trade and Industry for P100,000-worth of bakery equipment and supplies; and the National Council for the Welfare of the Disabled that extended P75,000 (\$1,500) for bicycles-for-rent in the park.

From 1998 to 2004, she also served as President of the Nueva Vizcaya Provincial Federation of RICs. During that time, the Provincial Government of Nueva Vizcaya through former Governor Rodolfo Agbayani gave her group a seed fund of P50,000 (\$1,000) for their projects.

In 1998, while not yet a ‘senior’ herself, Tina spearheaded the formation of *Lallakay Babbaket League* in Bayombong. This has kept the ‘seniors’ busy, engaging in both social work and leisure activities.

As head of various organizations, Tina has always displayed her brand of leadership, marked with transparency, accountability and unwavering commitment.

“As a leader, you lead people. And as a manager, you make things done — even at the point of risking your life — all for the organization,” she stressed.

In recognition of her leadership and achievements in community development, the Department of Agriculture, through its Regional Field Unit II (Cagayan



Valley), nominated her as one of the finalists in the national search for “*Outstanding Rural Woman-Achievers*” in 2004.

For others, it would have meant a time for rejoicing, a rare opportunity for national exposure and recognition. But for Tina, it was not to be. During the final interview



— by committee members of the DA Gender and Development (DA-GAD) Focal System — she was at the bedside of husband Jojo. The following day, he passed away — another blow and challenge in Tina’s life.

She was eventually declared the national winner, a fitting recognition for all

her efforts and sacrifices as a community development worker and leader.

In 2005, Tina was nominated to the Women’s World Summit Foundation’s (WWSF) “Prize for Women’s Creativity in Rural Life.” The Foundation honors women and women’s groups exhibiting exceptional creativity, courage and commitment in improving the quality of life in rural communities.

That year, she clinched a graduate scholarship in Development Management sponsored by the Ford Foundation at the Asian Institute of Management (AIM) in Makati City. She thus had to take a 20-month leave from her various organizations in Nueva Vizcaya. The AIM post-graduate course included a “sandwich” program, which would enable her to go to The Hague, in the Netherlands, where she would take an 11-week (April 24 to July 8, 2006) Diploma Course on Governance, Democratization and Public Policy.

Wherever she goes, Tina cannot help but share her talents, her leadership, and part of her heart with the people and community she has long loved and served.

Tina is enormously grateful to the Almighty for the gift of life and the many challenges that go with it, fashioning her into a consummate community worker and leader.

“Everything in this world is not an accident. It was all designed to happen,” she declared. “Physical disability is not at all a liability, as I believe in one’s purity of heart. What is essential is invisible to the eye.” (CCS/NOR)



Milagros Calzado Calaguio

Leon, Iloilo

Livestock industry driver

She nurtures the livestock industry in her hometown

In Leon, Iloilo, a town marked by a rolling to mountainous terrain, it is natural for the townfolk to tend to livestock, especially cattle and carabao, as source of livelihood. Of the town's 85 barangays, 84 have rolling lands and one is a large plain. It is no wonder therefore that about 90 per cent of the farmers are engaged in livestock farming.

In 2001, over 7,000 large ruminants were registered, which could be surmised that many more were not accounted for by the Municipal Agriculture Office. Income from raising large ruminants supplemented the farmers' incomes from rice and other crops, chiefly vegetables.

For generations, Leon farmers raised cattle and carabao in a continuous cycle of inbreeding and trading. No one, it seemed, found any problem with what was turning out to be a significant, but underpaying economic activity, until Milagros Calzado Calaguio, a native of the town, took on one of the two vacant positions for agricultural technologists at the Municipal Agriculture Office.

"Milag," as she is widely known among the townfolk, realized early on that her clients and



townmates were getting a poor deal from the native cattle and carabao breeds.

An agriculture graduate who majored in animal husbandry, Milag rued the sight of the native breeds brought to the weekly livestock auction market, not just in her town, but in neighboring areas, which

paled in weight and size compared with the hybrids she was exposed to. She rued as well the opportunity losses to the farmers and the community.

“In two years, an upgraded cattle may yield P24,000 for the farmer, while a native one will sell for only about P10,000,” she explained.

Armed with the conviction that raising cattle and carabao was a viable economic proposition for her hometown, she embarked on what became a progressive program to enhance the town’s herd through genetic improvement and proper nutrition. She introduced her client-farmers to sturdier and more vigorous “upgraded” animals, and consequently a more robust source of income.

Even while she was still assigned as an extensionist for crops in 1985, Milag trained in artificial insemination (AI) and pregnancy diagnosis for large ruminants with the Department of Agriculture’s Philippine Carabao Research and Development Center at the Carlota Stockfarm in Negros. The training was a joint project of the United Nations Development Program and the UN Food and Agriculture Organization.

Immediately after the training, and almost single-handedly, she started an AI program in her hometown. Even as she was hobbled by demands of her assignment as crop extensionist and lack of supplies, she forged on. She continued with this “on-and-off activity” through 1997, even when she was

assigned an additional job as the Municipal Multi-Livestock Development Loan Program (MLDLP) coordinator.

A program spearheaded by the DA's Bureau of Animal Industry (BAI), the MLDLP provides a guarantee fund that lowers the risk of participating rural banks in providing loans to farmers to procure upgraded cattle. The town of Leon was allotted a guarantee fund of One Million Pesos (roughly US\$20,000 at P50 = \$1) deposited with the Rural Bank of Alimodian (RBA).

As the municipal MLDLP coordinator, Milag helps the bank by vetting the prospective borrowers on their capacity to raise animals and pay back the loan. Her assistance starts by helping them prepare the required documents, including a farm plan and budget, which is equivalent to the loan proposal. She then assists qualified borrowers procure carabaos or cattle, either for breeding or fattening, at the livestock auction market.

Thereafter, she monitors the animal's health and physical condition, and reminds the owner that the animal should neither be sold nor disposed of until the loan is totally paid. Milag thus reminds farmer-borrowers to pay promptly their loan amortizations, which she also helps collect on behalf of the RBA during her regular visits.

Thus far, Milag has conducted four training-seminars on the mechanics of the program for 276 farmer-recipients.

Milag's valuable assistance, according to RBA President Paquito B. Causing, has resulted in high repayment rate, and greatly leveraged the guarantee fund, thus enabling more farmers to participate under the program.

In fact, in eight years, from June 1997 to October 2005, the bank has loaned out some P8.75 million (\$175,000), equivalent to 534 head of animals procured by 408 farmer-recipients. And some farmers, who fatten cattle, were even able to avail of multiple loans in just one year. Thus, the high repayment rate resulted in a faster turn-around of funds, Causing explained.

Leon's MLDLP experience, which was facilitated to a great extent by Milag, is one of few bright spots in an otherwise dreary national picture of the MLDLP



program, which saw some of its funds go down the drain as participating rural banks collapsed.

In 2001, in recognition of her training, expertise and commitment to the livestock sector, Milag was assigned as a full-fledged livestock technician. From that

year onwards, she has focused more on livestock upgrading projects, anchored on providing AI services, where as of November 2005, 352 head of cattle and 162 carabao were inseminated, yielding 129 offsprings, of which 93 were cattle and 36 were carabaos.

In 2003, Milag attended the 18th National Dairy Congress of the Dairy Confederation of the Philippines in Lipa City, Batangas (south of Metro Manila). This led to her latest effort to start the development of a dairy industry in her hometown.

In barely a year, she initiated the formation of the PAABOT Dairy Farmers' Association, the first of such group in Iloilo, covering six barangays in the town of Leon, the first letters of which form the group's name: **P**andan, **A**nonang, **A**gboy, **B**uenavista, **O**mambong and **T**alaucan.

She also vigorously lobbied for the Municipal Development Council to fund two three-day seminars on basic dairy husbandry, held in June 2004 at Barangay Anonang and in September 2005 at Barangay Oluangan. Milag likewise helped organize a dairy venture for another group, the Sitio Guibuangan Dairy Farmers' Development Cooperative (SiDaFaDCo), in June 2005.

To help the two cooperatives get started by acquiring upgraded dairy cows, Milag assisted them to participate under the DA's GMA-CARES National Dairy Authority (NDA)-QUEDANCOR Dairy Financing Program.

GMA stands for *Ginintuang Masaganang Ani* (golden, bountiful harvest), and CARES for Countrywide Assistance for Rural-Urban Employment and Services. GMA-CARES is one the financing programs administered by the Quedan and Rural Credit Guarantee Corp. (Quedancor), in cooperation with the NDA, which are both attached agencies of the DA.

PAABOT and SiDaFaDCo got financing for 36 and 28 heads, respectively, of local-born and New Zealand-bred Holstein Sahiwal dairy cows.

Now, the dairy herd has expanded to 95 heads, all because of Milag's continuing AI program, noted NDA regional manager Grace J. Cenas. The entire herd contributes a total of 950 liters of fresh milk daily to the NDA-LGU milk-feeding program, covering five municipalities in Iloilo, namely: Dingle, Tigbauan, Janiuay, Zarraga and Sta. Barbara. The milk is sold at P12 to P15 (\$0.24 to \$0.30, at P50=\$1) per liter, thus giving the two cooperatives a combined gross income from P11,400 to P14,250 (\$207 to \$259) daily.

Cenas also noted that Milag's extension services also benefit other dairy farmers from adjoining towns like Tigbauan and Oton.

Already, Milag is planning to further augment dairy milk production in Leon and other towns by introducing carabao as additional source of milk. This early, the Dusacan-Cuyugan Norte Multi-Purpose Cooperative, Inc. has expressed interest to engage in this new venture.

She is also planning to develop organic chicken farming in her town, noting the growing market preference and favorable prices for organically-grown birds.

To help sustain the livestock projects, Milag plans to introduce forage and pasture development among farmers, as during summer food for large ruminants become scarce. Promoting planting of hybrid forage species among farmers' cooperatives will thus help address this recurring problem, she explained.

In achieving her feats, Milag has to face down challenges. Chief of them is the lack of material support from government.

She relates that in conducting her activities, she has to draw from her personal fund for traveling expenses, including supplies and materials for AI services.

Further, instead of relaxing at home during weekends and holidays, she spends them with her farmer-constituents.

For all these, she had to draw on her apparently bottomless well of patience, which most of the time is tested, when she calls or conducts meetings and seminars for farmers: the trainees do not come on time.

She notes though that the farmers are very responsive to her initiatives. She likewise says that the Municipal Government of Leon, led by the Mayor Romulo Cabana, Sr. and Municipal Agricultural Officer Rodolfo Cañamo, has been very supportive.

By Milag's analysis, the biggest development problem in her town is the lack of farmer access to new information on modern farming technologies. She responds to this in the best way an agricultural technologist can. She constantly updates herself with new information by religiously attending training and seminars, and passes on the knowledge she gained to her clients, almost immediately through "echo" or "cascade" seminars.

She walks the extra mile for her townmates, by helping them and herself translate these knowledge into concrete projects and activities that will enhance farming and farm-based livelihoods.

Milag's commitment to help may have been forged by her life experiences.

At age 11, while in Grade 4, her father Placido died, leaving her mother Florencia to fend for the brood of seven, four girls and three boys. Being the eldest, Milag helped her mother raise her younger siblings, and tend their one-hectare farm planted to banana, corn, rice and coconut.

She had to postpone her schooling to give way to younger siblings. For instance, while she finished elementary in 1962, she had to wait for five years (in 1967, when she was already 18 years old) before she could continue and pursue high school education.

Further, she had to walk eight kilometers everyday, to and from their house and the Leon National Agricultural School.

After graduating in high school in 1971, she enrolled at the then Iloilo National College of Agriculture (now Western Visayas College of Agriculture). Due to meager income, she had to forego her dream of becoming a veterinary doctor, which then would have required her to study in Luzon. Instead, she pursued a B.S. Agriculture degree, major in Animal Husbandry. She supported her way through college by working part-time as a farmhand at the school farm for two hours each in the morning and afternoon during school terms, and eight hours a day during summer.

In 1975, she earned her diploma, and subsequently worked as a casual employee, earning a measly wage of P11 a day, at the then Bureau of Agricultural Extension (now, Agricultural Training Institute of the DA). Three years later, she became a regular employee, as Farm Management Technician I.

Despite her meager salary, Milag was able to send her siblings through school. Three have already earned college degrees — one is a forester and currently a professor at the Capiz State University, another is a food technologist, and the third is set to follow her footsteps, joining the Western Visayas Agricultural Research Center as an agriculturist.

Now in her early 50s, Milag remains single. (SHC)



She first raised orchids profitably, and later went into growing tilapia and freshwater shrimp

Floresma Alivia Dacuycuy

Barangay Magdalena, Cabatuan, Isabela

Pioneer 'ulang' grower

A pharmacist by profession, Floresma Alivia Dacuycuy, or Aling Baby, was lured into agriculture, starting with her orchid hobby and then aquaculture, raising tilapia and more recently freshwater shrimp or *ulang*.

She does not regret leaving the *Flores de Mayo* drugstore, which she and doctor-husband Rolando put up in 1973. Aling Baby is a B.S. Pharmacy graduate from the Centro Escolar University in Manila.

Her journey began in the early 80's when Aling Baby allotted more time and attention to her hobby of tending ornamental plants, especially collecting and propagating rare orchid varieties.

Soon, her hobby transformed into a full-blown business venture, making her name and orchids known throughout Cagayan Valley, a region in northeast Philippines. In just a few years, her orchid collection grew by leaps and bounds, and orders came from as far as Baguio, Batangas, and even Davao, in Mindanao.

To expand her new business, Aling Baby got a loan worth P500,000 (\$10,000) under the government's "*Kalakalan 20*" program. On



August 23, 1993, she formally opened the *Isabela Green Orchids Farm*, occupying an initial half-a-hectare (5,000 square meters) and eventually expanding five-fold to 2.75 hectares.

Then, the inevitable happened — the orchid business dislodged the drugstore in terms of income, many times over. Thus, she

decided to close down the pharmacy, so she could devote more time to the flourishing and more profitable *Isabela Green Orchids Farm*.

Innovative and energetic, Aling Baby has made use of every farm space — by placing the driftwoods horizontally instead of the traditional vertical method in propagating vanda varieties. She has also grown accustomed to using certified planting materials.

Moreover, she planted several fruit trees such as jackfruits, durian, lychees, guapple and aromatic coconut trees, as well as different species of herbal plants.

In October 1998, she won the “*Most Outstanding High Value Commercial Crop Farmer*” in Cagayan Valley, under the *Gawad Saka*, an annual contest sponsored by the Department of Agriculture (DA). The recognition inspired her more, acquiring knowledge on the latest trends in orchid farming and marketing.

A year later, Aling Baby wanted to try something different — aquaculture. So, she consulted friends on the feasibility of constructing a fishpond, and attended seminars and training on tilapia production. This marked the beginning of her new business endeavor.

Thus shortly in 1999, with assistance from the Provincial Government of Isabela and the DA’s Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (DA-BFAR), she constructed two fishponds at the back of her orchidarium, where a free-flowing water source was tapped.

The tilapia venture likewise flourished, which has also provided additional income to several women in the village (Barangay Magdalena), buying tilapia right in the farm at wholesale prices, and then selling them in nearby markets. With increasing fish harvest, Aling Baby also went into producing smoked and dried tilapia.

But three years later in July 2002, she got hooked into another aquaculture venture — freshwater shrimp or “*ulang*.” It was a result of her joining a “*Fisheries Caravan*” organized by the DA-BFAR in Cagayan Valley. Because of her interest in the new technology, she was tapped by BFAR as one of the cooperators of the agency’s *ulang* grow-out techno-demo project.

To learn more on *ulang* production, she attended a four-day seminar and hands-on training at BFAR’s National Freshwater Fisheries Technology Center (NFFTC), in Muñoz, Nueva Ecija. Thereafter, she constructed a hatchery, designed by NFFTC chief Dr. Melchor Tayamen. The hatchery consisted of six circular rearing tanks, eight rearing aquaria, four *artemia* hatching jars, and laboratory equipment like microscope, beakers, glass slides and hand refractometer.

Innovative, Aling Baby has formulated her own feed recipe for *ulang*, composed of mixed coconut meat, overripe or discarded carrots and papaya, boiled fish entrails, tilapia fingerlings, and boiled cow’s hide. She also makes use of old plastic bottles and softdrinks as *ulang*’s breeding shelters.

Further, she also makes use of the runoff water from the ponds and hatchery to irrigate the farm, which is also planted to rice. To save on molluscicides or chemicals to control snails, she encouraged farm workers and their children to gather *kuhol*, which she bought at P3 (\$0.06) a kilo.

Aling Baby also practices composting and proper waste recycling procedures she learned from the Environment and Management Bureau of the Philippine Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR).

All told, she gathers current developments and updates from government offices like the DA, and the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) on agribusiness matters and market trade fairs.



Since she started operating the hatchery, she has graciously hosted a series of training on *ulang* production right in her farm — conducted through the joint efforts of the Provincial Government of Isabela, City Government of Cauayan, and DA-BFAR — attended by fishpond owners, and agriculture and fishery students.

Hospitable and generous, Aling Baby shares some of the farm’s produce with visitors and underprivileged families in her community.

Wanting to help her co-villagers and townmates to succeed in their respective ventures, she has encouraged them to visit her orchid and aquaculture farm regularly to pick up some production and management tips. Now, several of them have their own successful farm ventures and fishponds.

Because of her pioneering efforts in promoting freshwater shrimp production, the province of Isabela, and Cagayan Valley region in general, have been invariably referred to as “*Ulang Country*.”

And her Green Valley Ulang Hatchery Project has since been a showcase of the successful partnership between the private and government sectors.

For these efforts and accomplishments, she was declared in July 2005 as one of the “*Outstanding Women in Fisheries and Aquatic Resources*,” during the National Science and Technology Week Celebration and 16th Annual Science and Technology Fair of the Department of Science and Technology.

Another award came her way four months later in October 2005, when the DA and Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations recognized her as one of the “*Outstanding Rural Woman-Achievers*.”



Despite her wealth and success, Aling Baby has remained simple. In fact, visitors often mistake her for one of the farmhands, as she mingles and works with them.

She has been a generous and compassionate farm-owner and manager, ensuring that all of her 25 workers are reasonably compensated.

Further, as a way of gratitude, she would give them cash incentives whenever harvests and sales were up, on top of their regular Christmas bonus. Being a pharmacist, Aling Baby requires them to undergo regular medical check-up, and when found sick, she would provide them proper care and medicines.

“Success is not measured by how much wealth you have accumulated, but how many people you have helped,” she quipped. (*EMP/ADR*)



She transformed 'chichacorn' into a 'hot' export

Clemencia Abrogena Padre

Bantay, Ilocos Sur

Food product innovator

In 1989, Clemencia “Menchie” Abrogena Padre, then in her thirties, was a full-time housewife. She busied herself tending the household, and rearing her daughters, Ma. Jennifer and Mariel Angelique.

But she was bent on helping husband Domingo, a furniture-maker, earn extra income; thus she started a home-based enterprise, producing crispy, deep-fried corn kernels, locally called “*korniks*.” A product she was familiar with, *kornik* was prepared then by her mother as a regular snack during her grade school years.

But this time, Menchie innovated, improving the quality and creating more choices, from the original garlic-flavored to spicy, sweet, barbecue, cheese, and adobo.

Her determination, entrepreneurial skills and academic background — having finished BS Commerce at the Divine Word College, in Laoag City, Ilocos Norte, in 1983 — have all contributed to the successful transformation of a “backyard” enterprise into a multi-million peso business, which now also serves the export market.



Menchie recalls that among her first and loyal customers then were her relatives, friends, neighbors, and clients of their furniture business. After a year of operation, with increasing customers and business flourishing, she decided to expand. She availed of a P5,000-loan (roughly \$100 at \$1 = P50) from the Business

Resources Development Center of the Mariano Marcos State University in Batac, Ilocos Norte.

In 1992, with two full-time workers, her *kornik* enterprise covered more ground and gained additional customers, as a result of her joining trade fairs in Ilocos and nearby provinces, where she put up stalls that sold and advertised her *korniks*.

The following year, she put in an additional capital of P15,000 (\$300), and had her business formally registered as “*Ilocos Chichacorn*” with the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI). She coined the term “*chichacorn*” to mean crunchy, crispy deep-fried and spiced corn kernels.

She then started joining provincial and national trade fairs to sell and advertise *chichacorn*. Her first big trade fair was at the Manila Hotel in 1994, and thereafter she displayed and sold products in various malls and establishments in Luzon, Metro Cebu and cities in the Visayas and Mindanao.

Orders started to pour in, and Menchie’s *chichacorn* production had to keep pace. So, she looked for other sources of raw materials, particularly glutinous white corn, with the assistance of the Department of Agriculture-Regional Field Unit I, and the Provincial and Municipal Government of Ilocos Sur and Bantay, respectively.

Since then, Menchie has maintained a pool of corn growers and suppliers, who planted hybrid varieties and employed sustainable technologies such as use of *trichogramma* against corn borers.

Menchie and her husband Domingo also coordinated with the Department of Science and Technology (DOST), which designed and provided needed equipment such as bed type dryer, peanut roaster, banana chip slicer, automatic packaging machine, and chichacorn plastic packaging for their factory. Thus, they were able to mechanize their operations.

Due to a corn shortage in October 1995 caused by El Niño, Menchie turned to producing banana chips, which fortunately clicked, and called it “*chichabanana*.”

Seeing that ‘lady luck’ was on her side, Menchie boldly ventured into other products: vinegar (from sugarcane); “*basi*,” a distinct Ilocano wine made from fermented sugarcane juice; and roasted peanuts.

In 1996, to highlight her expanding enterprise and wide-ranging product lines, she renamed her business into “*Ilocos Food Products*.”

In 2001, Menchie faced a major challenge — a strong typhoon hit Ilocos Sur, wiping out numerous crops, including corn and banana. However, she did not lose hope, and started producing *camote* (sweet potato) chips.

Today, Menchie is producing a range of Ilocos food products, from snacks to vinegar and basi, and to her latest “squash noodles,” a craze in Metro Manila and other provinces.

She was able to conquer the export market, starting in October 2000, when she attended the 5th Program for Asian Entrepreneurs in Osaka, Japan, where she forged a deal with a Japanese businessman, who agreed to sell *chichacorn* in his chain of retail stores. Menchie’s trip to Japan was made possible through the assistance of the Philippine Department of Trade and Industry (DTI).

Now, she is also supplying Ilocos food products to the United States, through Walter Mart, and I-Mart, and other countries like Hongkong, Singapore, and Canada. She is also eyeing Europe and Saudi Arabia, where there are hundreds of thousands of captive customers: Filipino immigrants and workers. She said that enlisting as a member of the Philippine Numbering Article (barcoding of items) has helped open up additional export markets.



In all, she continuously maintains her major domestic outlets in Metro Manila, which include Rustan's and Shoemart, and in other provinces.

With her earnings through the years, making Menchie and husband Domingo millionaires in their own right, they have renovated their small house into a two-storey,

six-room mansion, complete with modern amenities. Now, they also have a fleet of four delivery trucks and utility vans that transport their products to retail outlets nationwide.

With honesty as her policy in business, and with her strong faith in God, Menchie is proving that there's money in agribusiness.

"Where you excel most, there you should be," Menchie said, recalling her failed venture then of selling imported clothes from Hongkong. Learning from that experience, she stayed and remained focus on her *chicacorn*-based enterprise.

Despite her success, Menchie has remained humble, friendly and persevering. Many of her clients find her a charismatic businesswoman.

She proudly declares that "the quality of our products, their crispiness and incomparable taste, are our main attraction and selling points. And I want to continue exploring other areas and developing new products."

Indeed, a lot of opportunities abound, and prospects look bright for *Ilocos Food Products*, where Menchie still supervises its day-to-day operations. (CCS/NOR)



This senior citizen showed the way to hybrid rice farming and was nation's model farmer in 2001

Luzviminda Tan Lozada

San Isidro, Hagonoy, Davao del Sur

Ageless, change farmer-leader

“Age does not really matter,” is once again proven by 78-year old “Lola” (grand mother) Luz Lozada. But in her case it is not a love affair, as we always associate the adage with.

Despite her age, she is still up and about, strong and energetic, and farms. And she has exceeded everyone's expectations.

In 2001, she was declared as the “*Most Outstanding Rice Farmer of the Philippines*,” in a nationwide contest among farmers and fishers, called *Gawad Saka*, conducted annually by the Department of Agriculture (DA).

A “farmer at heart,” Lola Luz was convinced by an agriculture technician to plant hybrid rice, which resulted in a bountiful harvest of 170 cavans (1 cavan/50 kilos) or 8.5 tons of palay (*paddy rice*), a record in their village, and among the highest in Philippines at that time. Thus, she was declared as the most outstanding rice farmer in Davao region, in Mindanao, and received a cash award of P10,000 (\$200).

She went on to win the National *Gawad Saka* Award for the rice category, and received a trophy and cash prize of P25,000 (\$500) from no less than President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, in ceremonies held in Malacañan Palace, Manila.

Thrust into national limelight, Lola Luz has since then been making a difference in the lives of her co-villagers in Barangay San Isidro, townmates in Hagonoy, Davao del Sur, and other farmers nationwide.

She became, and still is, one of the leading models and advocates of the Philippine government’s hybrid rice commercialization program.

As most farmers then were skeptical — saying that “to see is to believe” — thousands of them have since visited Lola Luz’s five-hectare hybrid rice farm.

To them and to other visitors, her advice was: “The important factors in hybrid rice farming are thorough land preparation, proper seedling management, proper water management, use of a combination of organic (pig or chicken manure) and inorganic fertilizer, and effective kuhol (snail) control.”

In fact, the last factor — controlling kuhol — was an innovation that swung the votes in her favor.



Indeed, it was a novel idea, but tedious. It involves irrigating and draining the field interchangeably that would allow weeds to grow, which would then be eaten away by the snails, instead of the rice seedlings. All this she has proven after several experiments, which she conducted together with her husband and six farmhands.

Lola Luz also emphasized the importance of the “AESA” (agricultural eco-system analysis) technique she learned from an integrated pest management (IPM) training course. Through AESA, she said farmers would develop a keen sense of observing the different aspects of the field. These

include differentiating the bad and destructive insects from the friendly and beneficial ones, and deciding the appropriate time to spray chemical pesticides, based on the number and kinds of bad insects.

“You cannot do all these things, if you do not visit your farm early and regularly,” she said. An “early bird,” Lola Luz would visit her rice field as early as six in the morning —after watering the ornamental plants at home, at four in the morning!

“Footprints in the field are still the best of all farming techniques, as far as I know,” she added.

When asked of her plans five to ten years from now, Lola Luz said she would see herself still farming. Mainly because it was — and still is — their family’s main source of income that enabled her and husband Ng Fong, a Filipino-Chinese, to send their eight children (six females and two males) through college. Now, all are professionals — a doctor of medicine, an engineer, a teacher, two accountants, and three commerce graduates — and have families of their own. Four of them are living abroad.

Lola Luz is now a widow.

Actually she started planting rice in 1997, using IR 64 variety. At that time, her harvest reached only 100 cavans per hectare.

When she shifted to “*Mestizo*” hybrid rice variety in 1999, she got a yield of 140 cavans. The following year, it increased to 150 cavans. In 2001, she planted all the five hectare to *Mestizo*, yielding an average harvest of 170 cavans per hectare, giving her a net income of P41,000 (\$820) per hectare. At two croppings per year, she earned a total income of over P410,000 (\$8,200) from the five hectares.

With her success, many if not all of her fellow farmers in their village (Barangay San Isidro) shifted to planting hybrid rice, making their town (Hagonoy) one of the leading hybrid rice areas in the Philippines.

“I was really happy when my fellow farmers also planted hybrid rice, as they realized that they would also be producing and earning as much as I did. Thus, I even taught them how to prepare and plant the hybrid seeds properly,



because they were used to planting traditional home-saved seeds, using three sacks to a hectare, compared with 20 kilos when using hybrid seeds,” Lola Luz explained.

For all her accomplishments, she has agricultural technician-cum-seed inspector Ruel Tambalque to thank for. He convinced her to shift to

hybrid rice. Although hesitant at first, Lola Luz gave in after getting assurance that she would be provided with free hybrid seeds from the DA’s Philippine Rice Research Institute (DA-PhilRice), and that she would get sustained technical support throughout the cropping season from Ruel and DA-Region 11 seed coordinator Rose Mediano.

When told that a 20-kilo bag of hybrid seeds would be enough for one hectare, she told Ruel and Rose: “It’s impossible!” Her pessimism increased when she saw that the seeds looked like underdeveloped grains.

The rest is history.

Lola Luz’ passion for farming is not only confined to hybrid rice. She has also a 200-tree mango orchard, and has maintained an array of ornamental plants in her backyard.

“I will never get tired of farming. Although I have already 11 grandchildren, I could see myself devoting the rest of life attending to my farm,” she said confidently. (*ADR/NOR*)



She charted paths for woman-leaders in the agri-fishery bureaucracy

Fe Divinagracia Laysa

Bicol Region

Trailblazing lady executive

Rising through the ranks by sheer perseverance and continuous academic pursuits, she gained 17 awards and scholarships and scaled through the ladder of success, starting as plant laboratory aide at the Bicol Experiment Station (BES), and finally as Regional Director of the Philippine Department of Agriculture (DA) in Bicol (Region 5), in southeastern Luzon.

For centuries, producing pili nut in raw and processed forms for the whole country has been the domain of the Bicolanos. But it was only in the 1990s, though, that an initiative to preserve and upgrade pili's genetic resources were mounted, promising a measure of improved productivity and sustainability to the industry.

This initiative was spearheaded by Dr. Fe Divinagracia-Laysa, in a demonstration of the perceptiveness and acuity — that would mark her path-breaking term as the first woman-regional director of the DA.

During her stint, Fe was also program leader of the five-year Integrated Pili Research and Development Project – an inter-agency project

funded by the Philippine Council for Agriculture, Forestry and Natural Resources Research and Development (PCARRD) of the Department of Science and Technology (DOST) — whose modest research breakthroughs opened the Bicol’s pili industry for commercialization.

The project was implemented by the DA-Region 5 in cooperation with other national and regional agencies and institutions, which included: the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), Bicol University College of Agriculture (BUCA), Department of Science and Technology (DOST), National Economic Development Authority (NEDA), and the Camarines Sur State Agricultural College (CSSAC).

Under the project, a Pili Regional Research and Development Center (PRRDC) was established in Tabaco, Albay, which serves as a repository for outstanding pili varieties and a research facility to continuously develop improved ones.

A native of Pili — the capital town of Camarines Sur, and named after the indigenous nut — Fe observed that since pili has always been there, Bicolanos have sort of taken it for granted, harvesting the fruits year after year and not trying to breed to improve its traits.

The development of pili was not given importance in the past, Dir. Laysa said. Now, it is given the recognition and support it rightfully deserves, alongside mango and banana.

“We have transformed pili into a food commodity. And since then we have been extensively propagating female (fruit-bearing) pili seedlings by grafting,” she added.

At present, the PRRDC boasts of three selections that have been approved as Seed Board varieties by the National Seed Industry Council of the Philippines.

It has initiated research on tissue culture of female pili seedlings and has succeeded in improving the results of asexual propagation of female pili seedlings through cleft-grafting. This led to the establishment of provincial clonal nurseries of outstanding pili selections.

It was also during Dir. Laysa's term when the "First Regional Pili Congress" was convened, where the breakthroughs then were presented, and drew about 800 farmers and processors, other stakeholders, as well as agriculture R&D policymakers, from all over the country.

Because of this feat, Director Laysa was chosen as one of the "20 Outstanding Filipino Woman Research Managers and Scientists in Agriculture."

Demonstrating a keen sense of the enabling role of national government agencies in sustainable development, she prioritized the upgrading of various agricultural support service centers. Thus, services and facilities of institutions were improved, which included the Pili Center, animal-breeding stations, seed farms, and fisheries demonstration farms and fry banks.

During her 16-year term, from 1987 to 2003, she networked and sourced funds, and established other vital agricultural centers in Bicol to support crop-livestock-fisheries integration programs. These included, among others the: Regional Freshwater Fishery Center at Fabrica in Bula, Camarines Sur; Regional Carabao Research and Production Center at Mabatobato, Mandaon, Masbate; and Regional Livestock Research and Breeding Center at Pecuaría, Bula, Camarines Sur.

Further, she has implemented special urgent projects to respond to calamities and tight supply situations, which have ensured sufficient supply of rice, corn, vegetables, eggs, and root crops. Such initiatives included "*Tanim Agad*" — an innovation that modified the planting cycle to avoid the region's



typhoon season — "*Oplan Rehab*," "*Oplan Mayon*," and "*Oplan Palarong Pambansa*."

Fe has also provided direction and packaged an institutional development plan and vision that involved extension workers as well as farmers, out-of-school youths, and rural women.

Also during her term, the Bicol region produced several national awardees under the annual *Gawad Saka* contest conducted by the DA, which has served as an affirmation that the DA has been making a difference in increasing the productivities and incomes of Bicolano farmers and fisherfolk.

Among the Bicolano *Gawad Saka* national awardees were: six farmers, two fisherfolk, one Municipal Agricultural Officer, one agricultural technician, one outstanding young farmer, one Provincial Agricultural and Fishery Council or PAFC (a two-time national winner), one Municipal Agricultural and Fishery Council or MAFC, one “*Magsasaka-Siyentista*” (farmer-scientist), and one coconut farmer.

In addition, four projects under the Livelihood Enhancement for Agricultural Development (LEAD) program have won national awards. LEAD is a long-running program of the DA through the National and Agricultural and Fishery Council (NAFC) that provides start-up funds for agriculture and fisheries enterprises and support service projects.

Bicol also won a national award for a successful *Gawad Kabisig* project, where assistance from government and private sectors converged.

It has also been named national outstanding region for its 4-H Club programs and activities, and 22 out-of-school Bicolano youth were chosen to train in Hawaii, Japan, Taiwan, and Singapore by the Japan Agricultural Extension Council (JAEC) and the Philippine Agricultural Training Program (PATP) in Hawaii.

By maintaining linkages with local officials and devolved extension workers, Dir. Laysa and her staff have provided infrastructure support services to Bicol farmers in irrigation, postharvest technology, farm mechanization, and supply of quality seeds. During her term, Region 5 has increased its rice sufficiency level by 20 percentage points, from 55% in 1987 to 75% in 1999. She attributed her success to her familiarity of the region, just like the palm of her hand. She said that as a *Bicolano*, she is compelled to contribute her share in hastening the socio-economic development of the region, which is depressed compared with the rest of Luzon.

Likewise, she acknowledged the help of her friends in Manila and Los Baños, Laguna, who have helped her and DA-Region 5 in resource generation. “I always looked for my contacts, my contemporaries in the university. For example, procuring rice seeds from PhilRice has been easier because friends there have helped me. Former and current DA secretaries have also supported me, especially in the upgrading of facilities,” she recalled.

She has also marshalled foreign funding support for DA projects such as the Provincial Pilot Agriculture Extension Project for Albay and Camarines Sur, which was funded by the Australian government.

Of her strengths as manager, she said: “I had been fair, having risen from the ranks. I didn’t care about personal loyalties, one just needed to work and contribute. I had been approachable, and my staff and I never had a communication gap.”

When faced with budget constraint, she prioritized. She had survived the so-called “crab mentality” in the DA bureaucracy. And she had learned that being a woman was sometimes an advantage, as it inspired chivalry in men.

In November 2000, she was appointed as Regional Executive Director under the new DA structure.

Because of her leadership and accomplishments, several institutions, had bestowed on her numerous awards, among them were the: “*Distinguished Alumnus Award for Public Administration*,” given by the University of the Philippines College of Agriculture Alumni Association; “*Pantas Award as Research Administrator*,” from PCARRD; and “*Achievement Award for Research Management*” and “*Honorary Fellow Award*,” both from the Crop Science Society of the Philippines.

In 2001, she was given the *Presidential Lingkod Bayan Award*, the highest recognition given to government employees by the Philippine Civil Service Commission.

While as DA Regional Director, Dir. Laysa also served as a three-term Trustee of the DA’s Philippine Rice Research Institute (PhilRice); a Regent at Bicol University; and Trustee at CSSAC and Don Emilio Espinosa Masbate Agricultural College (DEBESMAC).

Fe also chaired the Bicol Consortium for Agriculture and Resources Research and Development (BCARRD), and served as project consultant of the Bangkok-based UN-ESCAP on the economics of rainfed farming in the Philippines.

She also served as commissioner of the National Commission on the Role of Filipino Women (NCRFW) for three years, during which she pushed for the implementation of development projects that provided women with income-augmentation opportunities.

Dir. Laysa became an agriculturist by choice.

Her father was a UP agriculture chemistry graduate, Class of 1924, and taught at Camarines Sur Agricultural College. “He was also a farmer, and was happy to grow our food. I was inspired by what an agriculturist or a farmer like him could do,” she reminisced.

“In all, I’m happy with what I’ve done at the DA. In a way, when I retired in 2003, I gave way to young people with new visions, dreams and ideas. And I believe I have developed capable understudies to take my place,” she added. That year she was honored by her DA colleagues as “*Outstanding GAD Advocate*.”

Now, she is indulging in her passion, making a model farm of her own. And she could not help convincing her neighbor-farmers to adopt modern ways of farming.

Fe has always believed that career women should take all opportunities for self-improvement.

“One could be a better person only if he or she has the proper training and exposure,” she noted. “It would make one confident in whatever he or she does and decides.”

Finally, she feels happy for her women-colleagues in the DA who have been appointed as regional directors. “I was probably able to show that women could do it,” concluded the former laboratory aide and first lady DA regional director. (EDR/ADR)



Thru seaweed farming, she brought wealth, jobs to co-villagers

Felicitas Bicoy Patria

Barangay Tamil, Jose Dalman,
Zamboanga del Norte

Seaweed entrepreneur

Jose Dalman, a 4th class municipality in Zamboanga del Norte, Mindanao, south of the Philippines, offers both land and sea as viable bases of livelihood for its nearly 6,000 households. By latest count, the town has some 14, 000 hectares of agricultural land and nearly 600 hectares of municipal fishing waters.

Felicitas Bicoy Patria, or Fely, born in 1964, grew up in these surroundings, but did not at first recognize the value of the town's economic resources to herself or to her family, despite the fact that her father was a fisherman. For instance, after second year in high school, she boarded a ship to Manila, where she worked for about a year as househelp.

But somehow, her town beckoned. Her father asked her to return and help him tend a two-hectare farm he recently bought. She heeded her father's call. Thus, began Fely's economic odyssey on her hometown's land and sea that brought her and her co-villagers honor and prestige.

In 2005, she was declared "*Outstanding Rural Woman*" by the Philippine Department of



Agriculture Gender and Development (DA-GAD) Focal System, a tribute to how well she, along with her husband, Felizardo, has nurtured a piece of Jose Dalman's land and sea, and coaxed to it to yield bounties for her family.

Further, the award was a testament to how well she parlayed her success into life's lessons that co-villages would do well to heed, and which she unselfishly shares with them through her active membership in socio-civic associa-

tions in the community.

Fely's success in farming, especially raising seaweeds, has reached a level that she has become a reliable resource person on the matter, not only in her town or province, but in the entire Western Mindanao region, as well.

She got married in 1983 to Felizardo Patria. The couple embarked on farming as their main livelihood, planting vegetables and root crops. Because of the El Niño phenomenon, their harvest was low. Thus, to help them augment their income, Fely's father taught Felizardo to fish, and in no time, he was able to mechanize his fishing operation.

For her part, Fely continued to farm, and raised carabao, swine, goat and chicken. On market days, she sold her own farm produce. On other days, she sold fish from her husband's operations. She would eventually expand her fish trading operations, extending to Dipolog City, capital of Zamboanga del Norte.

When fishing was not in season, Felizardo would join Fely in tending the farm, which they expanded, planting more crops such as cassava and *camote* (*sweet potato*), mango trees and banana.

In 1995, a three-man team — then municipal agriculturist Juan Lamayo, technician Rolando Galon and farmer Elesio Amit — promoted seaweed (*agar-*

agar) farming in Jose Dalman. Always on the lookout for opportunities to raise their income to support their growing children, Fely and Felizardo attended the seminar the three conducted.

Almost immediately, they started their seaweed farm, starting with 50 kilos of *agar-agar* seedlings. With rudimentary technology, they found seaweed farming a challenge. They used bamboo as buoys for the lines, but bouncing with the waves, the material actually contributed to the destruction of the budding plants. They replaced bamboo with plastic containers. Oil, and perhaps other chemical residues from these, contaminated the waters and stunted seaweed growth. They had to contend, too, with the weather.

Even then, the husband-and-wife team, along with the growing number of seaweed farmers in their town, realized the big potential from the crop.

In 1997, to enable them to help one another, and access support from local and national governments, they formed the Jose Dalman Seaweed Planters Association. As a result, they gained greater access to services from the Department of Agriculture's Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (DA-BFAR), the Municipal Government of Jose Dalman, and Quedan Rural Credit and Guarantee Corporation (QUEDANCOR), which extended some P10,000 financing to each seaweed farmer.

Fely was elected association treasurer. From this position, she encouraged the farmers not to give up on seaweed farming, even when their crops failed.

With assistance from the DA-BFAR, they improved their seaweed production methods. They replaced bamboos and plastic containers as buoys with styropor balls; nylon ropes were used to replace bamboo poles that rotted easily; and the nylon main lines were securely fastened to concrete block anchors. To optimize production, they reduced the planting distances between seedlings by half, from one foot to six inches; and between rows, from one meter to a foot. Further, they fenced off the farm's perimeter to prevent predators from eating away the seaweeds.

Fely's advice to her fellow seaweed farmers turned prophetic when later in the year and through the next, income from seaweed farming buoyed their livelihood, as the El Niño struck again and scorched their farmlands.



Soon, Fely's seaweed farm started paying off. In 2001, her half-hectare (5,000 square meters) yielded a gross income of over P160,000 (\$3,200). Encouraged, she expanded the farm by another one-fourth hectare the following year. And her income further rose to P650,000 (\$13,000), from 162,500 kilos in two croppings.

In 2003, she further expanded the farm into one hectare, where she earned a total of P914,000 (\$18,280) over two croppings.

And Fely has provided gainful employment to out-of-school youths in their fishing village, hiring from 20 to 30 males. They were paid according to the work rendered. For instance, P20 (\$0.40) per line to those who tie up the seaweed seedlings to the lines; P150 (\$3) to P200 (\$4) for those who harvest a boatload; and P100 (\$2) daily for other chores.

At the time of this interview, farmgate prices of dried seaweeds ranged from P33 to P38 per kilo, depending on quality. All of Jose Dalman's seaweeds were being bought by big seaweed companies in Cebu like FMC and Shemberg.

For all its robustness, however, seaweed farming in Jose Dalman, as all the other farm and fishery activities, is seasonal (from November to May) due to the town's biophysical and geographic attributes.

Thus, during off-season Fely and Felizardo attend to other economic activities such as fishing, from March to May, and farming (planting corn, vegetables and cassava), from May to November. They have likewise continued raising swine (15 head), carabaos (seven head), goat (10 head), and a large flock of free-range chicken.

She also engages in fish processing, dried fish and bottled sardines that come in two flavors (classic and Spanish). She anchors the sardine venture on the town's Rural Improvement Club (RIC), which markets the produce of all

members, of up to 200 bottles at any one time. Plans are afoot to have the RIC's sardines branded. In 2003, she earned P75,000 (\$1,500) from her sardines business.

From all her farm and business ventures, Fely has earned approximately a little less than a million pesos (\$20,000) a year. In addition, she has provided gainful employment to about 70 villagers: 30 in seaweed operation, 10 in fishing, eight in crop farming, 10 in fish and sardine processing, and 10 in handicraft making.

With their savings, the couple was able to build a new house, and to send their nine children to school, the eldest at 19 and the youngest at 4.

Fely takes great pride in their accomplishments and — without trying to demean the efforts of those who have left Jose Dalman to work abroad — says that their new house compares well to those built by fellow villagers who work abroad.

The implicit message is her abiding faith in the capacity of agriculture and fisheries to help build lives and livelihood for her community, and perhaps, for the country.

She has been actively involved in various community organizations, occupying top posts, which include: president of RIC, of Jose Dalman ZN Littoral Women's Association, and chairperson of *Gagmay Katilingban Simbahan* or Basic Ecclesial Community; vice president of Jose Dalman Food Processing Association; and treasurer of three groups — their village seaweed association, the town's federation of seaweed associations, and coconut farmers.

These organizations serve as venues where Fely has continued to encourage villagers and townmates to engage in farm and fishing ventures; adopt new ways of doing things; and more importantly share her life's lessons, especially with her fellow women.

“One needs to act, especially, in these times of crisis,” she noted. “Women should not just depend on their husbands or wait for dole-outs. They should help themselves, not the least of which, is by educating themselves in new ways of doing things and earning money. One need not go abroad for these.”

One will not dispute the truth and universality in Fely's message. Everyone, not just the women, might as well listen to her, and take heed. (*SHC*)



An education graduate, she chose to teach farmers to adopt sustainable corn farming technologies

Eufemia Ibanita Morandarte
Barangay Burocbusoc, Buhi, Camarines Sur

Integrated corn farmer-teacher

While professionally, 41-year old Eufemia Ibanita-Morandarte is a teacher — having earned a B.S. in Elementary Education degree in 1990 from the University of Nueva Caceres, in Bicol — she chose to be a farmer.

And she takes pride in having done so, as farming has been her family’s main livelihood, ably providing their needs for two generations. Specifically, corn farming has not only given her financial success and stability, but also personal satisfaction and fulfillment.

Ms. Morandante or “Femi” is the youngest of five children. Her parents have been into corn farming since they settled in the late 1940’s at the hilly lands of Sitio Kalogan, a kilometer away from Barangay Burocbusoc.

When her father died in 1999, she took upon herself the filial duty of taking care of her mother, who was then 64 years old, as most of her older siblings had their respective families to take care of and farms to tend.

Since then, Femi has been managing the family’s farm of 10 hectares, two of which she

inherited from her parents, while the rest was acquired through Republic Act No. 6657, also known as the *Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Law*.

When she started planting hybrid corn in 1995, she obtained an average yield of 125 sacks (1 sack = 60 kilos) or 7.5 metric tons. In the succeeding season, she got an average harvest of 6 tons per hectare, giving her a gross income of P92,000 (US\$1,820) — several fold more than what she usually obtained from planting traditional corn varieties.

Of the 10 hectares, three hectares each are planted to hybrid corn and rice, and two hectares each to banana and coconut.

From bananas, she earns at least P6,000 (\$120) a month. From rice, she harvests an average of 215 cavans or 10.7 tons (1 cavan = 50 kilos) per season. As for coconut, she has yet to wait for two more years before they start bearing fruits.

She has adopted new technologies to further improve corn production. In fact, she is among the farmer-cooperators of a research project conducted by the Philippine Department of Agriculture (DA) in their village. The DA project involves corn varietal trials, soil nutrient enhancement practices, and use of *trichogramma* as biological control agent against corn borers.

While a big part of her corn production expenses goes to chemical fertilizers, she said it is worth investing in. To save, she combines them with organic fertilizers such as composted corncobs.

As a corn farmer for more than a decade now, she has learned valuable lessons. To succeed, she said, one should anticipate problems such as pest infestation, which could be avoided if farmers within an area would plant at the same time or synchronously, as she and her counterparts do in Sitio Kalogan. They also practice de-tasseling and use *trichogramma* cards to contain corn borers.

As she was independent early in life, Femi also relies on her own resources to bankroll her farming operations, rather than depend on bank financing. Besides, she complained that banks impose high interest rates, and it takes a

month or two before the loan is released. Thus, after selling her corn produce, she sets aside enough money for the next cropping season. And through the years, she has saved a considerable lot.

As an advice to other farmers, she said they should strive to be self-reliant by being resourceful and enterprising. And it would be to their advantage if they organize themselves into a cooperative, just like what she and fellow farmers did in Sitio Kalogan, forming the Burocbusoc Upland Settlers Multi-Purpose Cooperative.

For several years now, their group has been enjoying the benefits of sustainable corn farming — thanks to the technical and logistics support extended by the Philippine government through the Department of Agriculture (DA), Municipal Government of Buhi and Provincial Government of Camarines Sur. Through these institutions, Femi's group was able to acquire production implements and post-harvest facilities, including regular technical assistance.

Despite her success, Femi continues to learn to further refine her farm production and management practices. For instance, she was one of the first enrollees of the “School On-the-Air” or radio program sponsored by the DA under its *Ginintuang Masaganang Ani* (or “golden and bountiful harvest”) corn program in 2003. She said she is willing to try the genetically modified Bt (*bacillus thuringiensis*) corn in her farm, but only after learning the proper technologies. Meanwhile, she is sticking to hybrid corn.

With substantial earnings from her 10-hectare integrated corn farm, she and husband Jesus, a policeman, were able to build their dream house, a three-bedroom bungalow, in 1996. The couple has two kids, Sarena and Kim.

Indeed, Femi does not regret abandoning the teaching profession. In fact, she believes she is amply contributing her share by serving as a model, teaching and encouraging other farm families modern, sustainable agricultural practices so they could likewise rise above poverty and enjoy the wealth of the earth.

(CCS/NOR)



Corazon Kub-ao Ryan

Sitio Mapaoay, Ipil, Tabuk, Kalinga

Highland fishfarmer

She raises fish profitably, and maintains an integrated farm — in the mountains

A B.S. Biology graduate from the University of Baguio in 1981, Corazon Kub-ao Ryan, is married to a British national, Jeremy Ryan. Initially, they were into rice farming, in Bulo, Tabuk, Kaliga, but later abandoned it, as it was not lucrative at that time. Thereafter, they moved and bought a farm in an adjacent village of Mapaoay, where they later constructed a fishpond stocked with tilapia in 1992.

Two years later, through the assistance of the Philippine Department of Science and Technology (DOST), they set up a hatchery for genetically male tilapia (GMT), which was a success. They then supplied GMT fingerlings to other tilapia pond owners in Tabuk and other towns in Kalinga. By then, they were also raising common carp.

Her perseverance and good example paid off when one by one, fellow Tabuk farmers — who were skeptical then — ventured into tilapia production.

In 1998, the Department of Agriculture through the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (DA-BFAR) in the Cordillera Administrative Region introduced the raising of freshwater shrimp or *ulang*. And so Ms. Ryan tried it, too, and succeeded in propagating *ulang* in aquaria and big plastic drums.

Now, the Ryan Farm serves as a model of farm integration and diversity, anchored on aquaculture. It has also become a favorite site for educational trips of students in the Cordilleras, and for regular visits of farmers who seek modern aquaculture and farming tips.

The farm has 10 ponds: five small ones, with a total area of 1,000 square meters, are used for breeding purposes; while the remaining five ponds are used for grow-out. The breeding ponds are stocked with GMT male breeders, at one piece per square meter. On the other hand, the grow-out ponds, having a total area of 6,780 square meters, are stocked at 20 pieces per square meter. She adopts a polyculture system in these ponds, which are stocked with tilapia (80%), common carp (10%), African *hito* or catfish (5%), and mudfish (5%).

The farm also features a vegetable orchard, a garden of ornamental and herbal plants, and a nursery of marcotted and grafted fruit tree and citrus seedlings. She also raises ducks and *kabir* chicken.

Thus, with visitors around, she shares her expertise and experiences with them. In addition, she serves as resource person on tilapia and *ulang* culture and hatchery management.

From aquaculture operations alone, Ms. Ryan grossed over P1 million (\$20,000) in 2004: the breeding ponds produced 150,000 fingerlings, worth P120,000 (\$2,400), while the grow-out ponds produced a total of 12 tons worth P1.08 million (\$21,600).

Now, Ms. Ryan is into *ulang* hatchery operations. For this venture, she took a one-week training at the Regional Freshwater Fisheries Center in Camarines Sur. On the other hand, her current stock of *ulang* breeders came from the National Freshwater Fisheries Technology Center in Muñoz, Nueva Ecija. She sells her output — the five- to 10-day old post-larvae *ulang* — at P2.50 each

She also maintains a four-hectare rice farm, which she has entrusted to a farmer who cultivates the land on a “*muerto basis*,” that is, he pays her back with 25 cavans of fresh palay per hectare per cropping. From this venture, she receives a total of 200 cavans, as the four-hectare farm is planted twice a year.

Ms. Ryan is also active in community activities and projects in her village and municipality. For instance, she is an active advocate of “zero waste management” schemes and pro-environment initiatives.

She also finds time to attend meetings conducted by government and NGOs regarding issues like peace and order, and other major community concerns.



To further expand her knowledge and skills in aquaculture, agriculture and other related disciplines, she regularly attends seminars and training or symposia. Thereafter, she in turn cascades new developments and techniques to her fellow Tabuk fishpond owners and farmers.

She believes that “in a day, there must be an accomplishment, because every minute is gold.”

For her feat, she was declared the “*Outstanding Fish Farmer in the Philippines*” in 1997, under the *Gawad Saka*, an annual contest among farmers and fishers conducted by the Philippine Department of Agriculture. (NOR)

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