

Balitang



The Official Newsletter of the Department of Agrarian Reform

Special Edition

**Sugar block farming
helps double yield - P10**

**An oyster
that bears fruit - P4**

Inspire

In this special edition of Balitang DAR, we tell the most inspiring stories of our agrarian reform beneficiaries. We celebrate the victories that we have achieved in the 30 years of the Department of Agrarian Reform's service. At the same time, these narratives hope to remind everyone of the tasks that still lay ahead – to replicate these successes in every part of the country and uplift the lives of all farmer-beneficiaries.

- Secretary John R. Castiglione

**Gold hunter
finds "gold" in farming - P6**

**Knocked down
but never undone - P12**



Rising Above Challenges

By Yadz Geyrosaga

A generous daily wage and housing for its member-workers are the attributes that make the Malita Rural Workers Agrarian Reform Beneficiaries Multi-Purpose Cooperative (Marwabempco) the envy of other farmers' cooperatives.

Many who see their homes inside the 148-hectare property of the cooperative, dubbed as the "Coop Village," can't help but wonder: "*May mga OFW kaya silang kamag-anak* (Do they have relatives working abroad)?"

But make no mistake. The blessings that the cooperative members enjoy today did not come easy.

They allegedly almost starved to death when the former landowners learned about their plan to split from their mother cooperative.

"We were no longer allowed to work in the plantation. For two years, we took odd jobs.

"But not all of us were lucky to find ones. Our families were starving because of limited work available," Marwabempco Chairman Rolly Mamada recalls.

But Mamada says the harassment and intimidation only strengthened their resolve to fight for what they believed were their rightful claims. One day, they decided to forcibly occupy a portion of the property and held their ground.

"We practically put our lives and limbs at stake, fighting against the injustices of the former landowner," Mamada says.

Cooperative vice chairman, Hermogenes Bicay quips: Had we not been able to dodge bullets, our struggles would not have been known. And this interview would not have happened.

Even the landowner's decision to surrender his 600-hectare farmland under the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP) turned out to be just a ploy, cooperative members claim.

The landowner allegedly placed his trusted henchmen to various influential positions in the cooperative to ensure that he would still be in complete control of his property.

"We just wanted real change," Mamada says.

For putting up a stand, Mamada says they were branded by fellow farmer-beneficiaries, whose loyalty was with the former landowner, as traitors, greedy and ungrateful, that they were only out to sow chaos and break up the cooperative.

The scariest moment for Bicay came when he saw armed guards positioning themselves in strategic places within the plantation, with the intention of driving them away.

"But we made a vow among ourselves to never give up the fight. So, we prepared for the worst – a bloodbath," Bicay says.

Fortunately, cooler heads prevailed through the intervention of the DAR, the provincial government and the police. Negotiations became the order of the day until a compromise agreement was reached three years later.

Finally, they were allowed to cultivate the 148-hectare farmland, their share from the 600-hectare property.

The worker-members toiled hard, planting cacao and coconut. Soon, they introduced bananas, lacatan and candava, in their crops. But it was in the cavendish variety of bananas where they made a big headway. This product delivered a total gross income of P25.5 million in 2017.

"Today, the cooperative has a P44.5-million asset and P9.9 million in net surplus," Marwabempco operations manager, Amil Shuck says.

Shuck stresses that the leadership of the cooperative is not very particular about the gains but on the loyalty of its members, who did not waiver and stood their ground against all odds.

No wonder, Marwabempco is so generous at giving above minimum daily wage of at least P500 for ordinary member-workers, P510 for team leaders and P520 for those holding supervisory positions. The cooperative made sure that there is little difference in the salary between cooperative workers and leaders.

"We made sure that the gains of the cooperative will truly be enjoyed by all members," Mamada says.

Truly, all's well that ends well. ☺



CARP empowers a Pangasinense farmer

By Elsha Marie Soriano

"Farming has been very good to us. It provided us everything we need and helped me send my children to school," the 69-year-old Florentino Aquino says.

Aquino, a resident of Barangay Leet, Santa Barbara, Pangasinan, started farming in 1968, at the age of 19, shortly after finishing high school.

He says that although the land reform program started in 1972, during the time of the late President Ferdinand Marcos, it was only in 1990, during the time of Marcos's successor, the late President Corazon Aquino, when his dream of owning a piece of farmland was finally realized.

It covered an area of a little more than an hectare.

Mang Tino, as he is fondly called, worked harder, with his family in mind.

Having been a farmer for the longest time enabled him to gain enough experience. And he was blessed, harvesting 130 cavans per cropping. He also started a piggery in his backyard, for additional income.

"Farming used to be a poor man's job. It was nearly impossible for us to send our children to school because we often found it hard to make both ends meet," Mang Tino says.

"Most of the farmers like me were mere tenants, working for landlords. Forty percent of our harvest went to the landlord and the remaining 60 percent were shared by us tenants," he adds.

But his fortune turned 180 degrees when the farm he was tilling was awarded to him.

It enabled Mang Tino to send his children to school. Six of them finished college and four completed vocational courses.

"The government's land reform program is a big blessing for us because it gives farmer-beneficiaries the chance to enjoy all their harvests," Mang Tino says.

Besides the education of his children, Mang Tino was also able to renovate his house into a concrete bungalow and furnish it with appliances. He also bought two motorcycles and a bicycle.

Aquino is just one of 78,198 Pangasinenses, who benefited from the government's land reform program. As of March 2018, DAR-Pangasinan has already distributed a total of 82,090 hectares of agricultural land. 🌱



A Family Affair

By Christine Ann Chavez

If success is measured by financial stability, education for one's children, a comfortable life, and a productive farm, then husband and wife Roque, Jr. and Paz Esmama, have long been enjoying it.

But it has not been a walk in the park for the Esmamas. Like many small farmers, the couple practically started from scratch.

They used to be farmhands or "incargados" in Barangay Balcon Maravilla, Jordan, Guimaras.

The incargado system has been the practice in their community until the comprehensive agrarian reform program was launched in 1988. The farm on which they toiled was later awarded to them.

The two worked hard on their newly acquired lot and developed it into a productive haven of fruit trees, vegetables and rice.

While others find no love for farming, the Esmamas enjoy every minute working on their farm.

Their passion for the so-called oldest profession bore fruits. They regularly harvested vegetables and sold them in their neighborhood and in public and private offices in the towns of San Miguel and Jorda. Paz even went a step further and delivered some produce in the Iloilo Terminal Market.

The hard working couple found consolation in seeing their seven children develop the same love for farming.

Their children, Rhona, Jovie, Joa Rey, Rodnie, Divina, Roque III, and Jephherd would often compete with each other.

They vied to care for the plots that will bear or produce the most fruits and vegetables.

And they were not only serious in farming. They also studied hard. Three of the seven siblings, in fact, graduated cum laude. Though they are now professionals and earning well, their love for farming stays.

They are, after all, just like their parents, Roque, Jr. and Paz, whose passion for farming remains.

Like parents, like children? You bet. 🌱



An oyster that bears fruit

By Kathleen D. Sespeñe – Pagayon

JardenVille Gracious Mushrooms is a blessing born of perseverance and grit, whose proprietor is as gracious as the name itself, the mushroom queen of Brgy. Luhib, Lake Sebu, Mrs. Criselda Jardenico.

Fondly called Te Cris by all who know her, this loving wife and hardworking mother of two, is an Agrarian Reform Beneficiary of the Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR) from the Land of the Dreamweavers, South Cotabato province. She is also the proud owner of an oyster mushroom cultivation and production business.

Her business, which started in 2016, optimizes farming and production of oyster mushrooms, aptly named for its resemblance in shape to the mollusk delicacy. The scent of various mushroom-based food products permeates the air and entices the community to sample and buy her own spin on classic merienda favorites: mushroom pizza, bread sticks, lumpia, siomai and the bestseller, empanada de Jardenico.

"I hoped to have an additional income for our cooperative, Highland Agricultural Credit Cooperative, so I thought it would not hurt if I attended a mushroom cultivation seminar provided to our organization by the DAR," Te Cris said.

"This, coupled with the Farm Business School Program from the DAR which aims to bring the school to the farmers, I was optimistic that I can apply the knowledge gained from the program and turn it into a profitable business," she added.

Armed with great resolve and positive outlook, she and her fellow coop members ventured into cultivating these edible fungi. They hoped to increase the income of their cooperative.

"I was the cooperative manager at the time and we were optimistic that the endeavor will be fruitful. A portion of my 2.9-hectare, DAR-awarded lot was converted into an incubation facility. It included a dark room to house the mushroom fruiting bags, with substrate consisting of wood shavings and rice hulls," Te Cris said.

But like so many enterprises before them, fate intervened and crushed their hopes into mush. The mushroom spawns did not thrive despite the work and sweat they invested. The venture was a disappointment.

Morale was at its lowest. The incident triggered the decision of the cooperative to discontinue their mushroom cultivation and move on to the production of higher value crops like bell pepper and ginger.

Te Cris was unsure of her next action. With a prayer of devotion to the heavens and the unending support of her family, she decided to push through with the business on her own.

"I started with a capital of P50,000 and 314 mushroom fruiting bags, and in only 3 months I began selling oyster mushrooms. Before long, many customers from nearby areas started to hear about my business. My family and I became so busy that to supply the demand of the customers, my husband



had to stop farming in our rice field and focused instead in helping prepare the substrates. Meanwhile my children helped with the ingredients needed for my recipes," Te Cris said.

"We sold fruiting bags for P35 each and was ecstatic with how the business was prospering. We sold over 10,000 fruiting bags since then. Customers from cities like Panabo, Davao, General Santos and Koronadal flocked our store to order and they were also keen on trying our mushroom-based food products," she added.

Seeing how far her business has come fills Te Cris with a sense of accomplishment.

JardenVille Gracious Mushrooms now earns about P60,000 per month just with their mushroom food products alone. They make another P15,000 per month in fruiting bags.

"I encourage my fellow ARBs to try oyster mushroom cultivation and production as there is such a high demand for it but not enough suppliers," Te Cris said.

DAR spurred my fervor to venture into mushroom cultivation and production. The livelihood trainings gave me knowledge on the steps to take to make my business grow, most especially on keeping record of my income and expenses and how best i can use

my time productively," she added.

Like a lone sailboat breaking through a storm, Te Cris battled the crashing waves of despair, criticism and failure, and forged on to become Lake Sebu's Queen of Mushrooms.

She is a testament that whatever fate has designed to weave on the tapestry of life, one can always undo the threads and

master his or her destiny.

"I am really thankful to the government especially the DAR for giving me the necessary knowledge in setting up my own enterprise. We still have a long way to go before our *tindahan* can be considered a big-time business, but we'll take on any challenge presented our way, one wave at a time," Te Cris said. ☺



"I was optimistic that I can apply the knowledge gained from the program and turn it into a profitable business."



Gold hunter finds 'gold' in farming

By Ross Lustestico and Edwin Yanzon

Fifty-four-year-old Adolfo Galvez used to pan gold in the Asid River in Masbate City. But it could only provide so much for his family. So, he turned to farming, where he finally hit the jackpot.

"Yes, there is 'gold' in farming," Galvez said.

Mang Casuy, as he is fondly called, may not have the "Midas' touch," but he certainly has a "green thumb." And for good reason: He grew up with farming as his family's lifeblood.

Despite this agricultural background, the lure of quick cash and the need to make a living for his family diverted his attention to a different industry.

"Gold panning in the rivers of Masbate City offered a lot of promises, then," Mang Casuy recalled.

However, as more and more people joined the gold rush, Mang

Casuy saw his earnings dwindle. Worse, the work took its toll on his body – he was afflicted with rashes due to excessive contact with mercury.

Mercury is a poisonous element used in the extraction of gold. Its intrinsic properties allow the separation of gold from other materials.

"One day, I woke up scratching. Since then, rashes appeared in my upper body, arms and legs. I thought it was just an ordinary skin disease. I used different anti-itch ointments and herbal medicine to no avail," Mang Casuy said.

"That was when I decided to stop gold panning in 1988. Soon after, the rashes on my skin healed until there was no more," he added.

Mang Casuy returned to what he knows best – farming.

In just one year, the land he leased was sold to him by its owner. It turned out to be just the beginning of a bright future ahead of them.

In the same year, the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program was launched and Mang Casuy became one of the first beneficiaries. He was awarded with a 2.5-hectare coconut farm.

"As the Certificate of Land Ownership Award (CLOA) was handed to me, I already envisioned many fruitful years ahead for my family," he said.

Mang Casuy quickly buckled down to work. He attended various trainings and workshops for new farming techniques. He also took a vocational course in fish culture. But the one that he appreciated the most was a newfound knowledge in organic farming.

He later came up with a formula mixing various organic materials

to come up with his version of fertilizers and pesticides.

For organic pesticides, he grinds ginger, onion and garlic. He extracts their juices and mixes them with a bottle of brandy and molasses.

Meanwhile, his recipe for organic fertilizers includes bolinao (a local fish), kangkong, spoiled rice, molasses, and animal waste. He stores this mixture for, at least, a month in a compost until its ready.

"(Organic farming) entails extra effort, but the dividend is great – safer farming and healthier food on the table."

“Organic farming is cheaper and safer for farmers, unlike the use of chemical-based fertilizers and pesticides. The latter may cause health problems as I experienced when I was still using them in my farm,” Mang Casuy said.

“It entails extra effort, but the dividend is great – safer farming and healthier food on the table,” he added.

In 2009, the Galvez family’s income reached almost a million Pesos from farming, farm equipment rentals and livestock. Half of the amount was spent on new farm inputs.

Four years later, the family began savoring the fruits of their hard work, acquiring a three-hectare palay farm, a 150-square-meter residential lot, two gensets, and a tricycle.

Of all his achievements, being hailed in 2010 by the Masbate City government as a farmer-scientist for his innovative approaches was the distinction that Mang Casuy cherishes the most.

This embodies the 3Ts – *Talino*, *Tipid* and *Tiyaga* – that he and his family have demonstrated in their roller-coaster ride to success.

The distinction was a fitting recognition for the man, who was cited as the third Most Outstanding Farmer in Masbate province in 1992, an Outstanding Masbateño in 2004 for his exemplary contribution to the economic

improvement of Masbate, and with the Provincial Outstanding Performance Award in 2005 for making his CARP-awarded farmland more productive.

For his feats, Mang Casuy was voted as chairman of the Asid Farmers Association, Inc. and appointed as barangay administrator.

Today, Mang Casuy keeps on doing what he does best – producing chemical-free crops. And he has tapped women in their barangay to deliver basketfuls of harvests – eggplants, okras, pepper, squash, radish, upo and cucumber – to different barangays in Masbate City.

In tandem with his wife, Ethel, the head of the Asid Rural Improvement Club, they provide female pigs and feeds to their constituents who want to start a piggery. When a female pig gives birth, they take half the number of the piglets for distribution to other willing hog raisers.

With all the blessings that have come their way, Mang Casuy and Aling Ethel are a picture of a happy and contented couple.

All that they pray for is irrigation and a farm-to-market road for the benefit of the whole community.

“This will surely fuel and hasten development in our community,” Mang Casuy says. 🌱



“As the *Certificate of Land Ownership Award (CLOA)* was handed to me, I already envisioned many fruitful years ahead family,”

Second time's the charm for Biliran Coop

By Melecia Ong

Cooperatives come and go. This was the bleak reality experienced by some residents of Barangay Lico, Naval, Biliran, who are mostly agrarian reform beneficiaries, after their organization's funds were allegedly lost through the machinations of some of its leaders.

It was no wonder, that there was hesitation and skepticism among them when the Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR) was convincing them to give cooperatives another chance.

Out of gratitude for the farm lots they received, the residents of Barangay Lico obliged. And so, the Lico Agrarian Reform Beneficiaries Multi-Purpose Cooperative was reborn on February 21, 2003, with 23 members and a measly capital of P4,600.

Under the leadership of Rebecca V. Payos, the cooperative ventured into lending business.

"We thought then that the best way to win the hearts and minds of our members is to make them feel that their basic needs are taken care of

Since most of them are in need of financial capital, we decided to go for it," Payos said.

The DAR provided orientation seminars aimed at pinpointing the reasons for the collapse of their old cooperative and the ways and means to prevent them from experiencing the same mistakes again.

The group took to heart the DAR's advice and they themselves were amazed at the way their fledgling business survived the test of time.

Encouraged by their small success, they applied for loan at the Land Bank of the Philippines (LBP)

under the Credit Assistance Program.

They managed to maintain a clean bill through their six cycles of loan, a testimony to their excellent financial management.

But their success would mean nothing without a home they could call their own.

So, they embarked on building their own office out of their earnings.

In compliance with the Republic Act No. 9520, the cooperative re-registered with the Cooperative Development Authority on

October 26, 2009 and renamed itself as Lico Agrarian Reform Cooperative or Larcoop, for short.

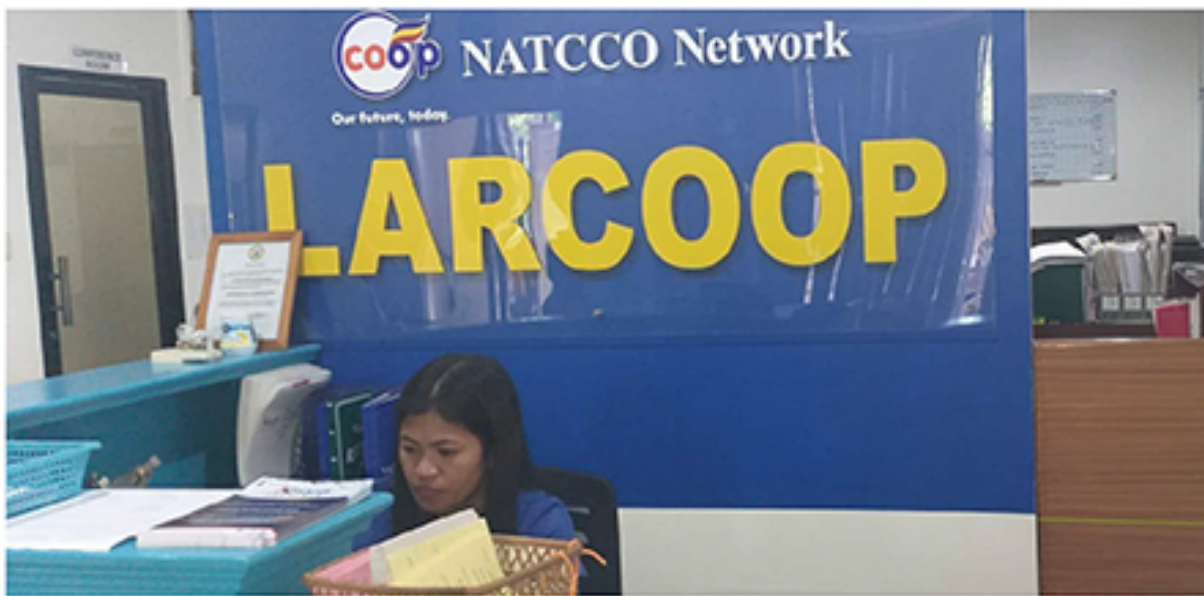
By 2012, the cooperative had already generated as much as P504,000, more than a hundred fold of their capital nine years earlier.

But the best has yet to come for Larcoop. It ventured into the Microfinance Innovations in Cooperatives which was being promoted by the National Confederation of Cooperatives (Natcco) together with the DAR.

Home Sweet Home. One of the first priorities of the Larcoop after it was able to get back on its feet is the erection of their own building that will house their organization. (Contributed Photo)



LARCOOP



"The idea is to address the financial needs of our cooperative members at very low interest rates because we wanted to maintain that harmonious relationship that we've developed through the years," Sereño says.

Support Services in pursuit of their Rice Productivity Enhancement Project.

From a struggling farmers' organization, Larcoop has carved a niche for itself.

Just recently, the Larcoop was chosen as the lead agrarian reform beneficiaries organization that was gifted with farm machineries under the Agrarian Reform Communities Connectivity and Economic

For Payos, "If at first you stumble, rise up and give it another try. It really pays the second time around, with the right mindset and the right attitude towards financial management." ☺

Larcoop received Natcco's nod on its second try and became its 56th cooperative nationwide and the first in Eastern Visayas (Region 8).

It gained access to a million-Peso loan from Natcco, payable for five years at 13% interest.

Larcoop used the loan to open a quasi-bank at the downtown area of Naval, the provincial capital of

Biliran, which is accessible to their clients and the commercial area.

Bibian Sereño, microfinance operations manager of Larcoop Quasi Bank, says they offer savings deposit, time deposit, kiddie savings deposit, as well as, providential, productive and microfinance loans for its members.

"The best way to win the hearts and minds of our members is to make them feel that their basic needs are taken care of."





Sugar block farming helps double yield

By Jose Alsmith Soria

Members of the Magsasaka ng Libongan Farmers Association (Magsalia) have every reason to be excited.

Through a newfound planting technology, they anticipate greater yield in the sugarcane plantation awarded to them under the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP).

They credit this windfall to the Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR)'s Sugar Block Farming Project (SBFP), implemented in partnership with the Sugar Regulatory Administration in 2017.

A farmer-beneficiary who can attest to the success of this new farming method is Reynaldo Francisco.

"Halos nagdoble ang na-harvest namo karon (Our harvest almost doubled)," Francisco says.

His harvest this season increased to 73.1 tons from an average of 40 tons. This translated to a gross revenue of P168,831, broken down as follows: P149,932 from sugar sales, P10,780 from molasses, P3,000 from intercropping, and P37,063

from trucking incentives. Deducting the production cost of P128,768, he netted P40,063.

Francisco, the president of the Magsalia, is one of 29 farmer-beneficiaries whose farm lots were consolidated to reach the 30-hectare requirement for sugar block farming.

They also found out that the use of organic fertilizer, a product of one of their revenue-generating livelihood projects, contributed to the increase of their harvests. The group also benefitted from the practice of intercropping with crops, such as, peanut, corn, mongo and white beans.

Magsalia is one of only two farmers' organizations that were tapped to try the SBFP. The project is being promoted by the DAR in a bid to improve farm productivity, increase the farmers' income, and improve the quality of their lives. The DAR commissioned the RU Foundry to impart to the farmers the new technology. **Continue on page11**

Farmers find loyal patron in DAR

By Rossana Gay S. Visitacion

They call themselves "risk-takers." After stumbling, not once but a number of times, they rose up each time, thanks to their ever-supportive patron, the Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR).

The San Jose Agrarian Reform Beneficiaries Multi-Purpose Cooperative (SJARBMP) survived trying times through

diligent fiscal management and the assistance of DAR.

Cooperative manager, Cresver Ancero is quick to give credit where credit is due.

"We owe it to the DAR. It is instrumental in what we have become. Every step of the way, it has been by our side, guiding us

Continue on page11



Sugar block farming helps double yield

From page 10

The latter taught them the “tractor spike” planting, where sugarcane seedlings were planted with the “baby” tillers facing sideways to ensure greater number of tillers growing. Though their group only applied the new farming method in their plantation this season, they are already the object of envy among

CARP beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries, all aching to replicate sugar block farming in their respective farms.

Magsalia has since dedicated an hectare of the plantation to serve as a model for the new farming method, which he and his fellow beneficiaries hailed as a success. ☺



Farmers find loyal patron in DAR

From page 10

during those periods of trial,” Ancero recalls.

The 22 pioneer members of the cooperative were thrilled when the DAR finally awarded them farmlands in a sugarcane plantation in Barangay Caputatan, Medellin, Cebu. The property was formerly owned by Juan Jose Moras. Their excitement, however, was short-lived when they found their coffers with little to finance the cultivation of their newly owned farm.

So, they did what they thought was best for them under the given circumstances. They leased out their collectively owned farm to the Bogo-Medellin Company, an agricultural firm. It was a big risk worth taking, however, as the DAR remained steadfast in helping them get a fair deal. The DAR, true to its mandate of helping small farmers stand on their feet, presented itself as somebody they could count on.

It worked out for them a fair deal that was good for three years. Besides the monetary consideration, the farmer-beneficiaries were hired as farm laborers, a pre-condition to the lease hold arrangement.

Since they were compensated for the services they rendered, the group chose to save every single centavo they earned from the contract. After the three-year deal ended in 2005, they saved as much as P400,000.

Believing that a home is vital for developing a strong bond between and among cooperative members, they decided to build their own office, which was erected in the same year for P110,000.

The rest of their money was put aside for the cultivation of their sugarcane plantation and in venturing into dairy farming.

While their sugarcane farm gained, the dairy farm faltered because of their lacking business acumen. They ventured into the business without a feasibility study. Their undoing turned out to be the distance of their production to the market. Medellin, Cebu to the city proper is a drive of 112 kilometers. By the time their milk and other milk-based products reached its destination, some of them were already stale.

“It was just one of a number of failures that we encountered. But we never lost hope because we knew that the DAR would always

be around to help us get through,” Ancero says.

The DAR quickly provided them hands-on training on basic business courses on bookkeeping, accounting and financial management.

With their coffers practically empty, the SJARBMPC took a bold move of seeking a P990,000-loan from the DAR’s Credit Assistance Program in 2006 for their sugarcane plantation.

This time, they were confident that they could take care of their fund, knowing that the newfound knowledge would keep them from repeating their past mistakes.

Little by little, they started to reap dividends. Three years later, they applied for a P500,000-loan from the Land Bank of the Philippines to buy a four-wheel tractor for their sugarcane farming. This spared them from renting the same equipment, while making additional cash when they rent it out to fellow farmers.

“We are really thankful to the DAR for arming us with much-needed business know-how. Through their intervention we’ve become more diligent in our spending and in entering into any business endeavor,” Ancero says.

In 2013, the cooperative tried hog-raising, starting with 80 piglets at P2,500 each for a total of P200,000. A 500-square meter piggery was built. It also bought a hauling truck for P280,000.

They were primed for success until Super Typhoon Yolanda struck in November of that year. Everything they worked for went down the drain again.

“As always, the DAR proved to be our guardian angel, assisting whenever we needed help,” Ancero said, referring to the P2-million loan it received through the Agrarian Production Credit Program (APCP).

After a few years, they were able to pay the loan which qualified them for a second loan cycle of P3 million.

They used P2 million to revive their sugarcane plantation and P1 million for their piggery.

And when it rains, it really pours. The DAR also gifted the cooperative with a 10-wheeler dump truck for hauling, worth P5.7 million under the Agrarian Reform Communities Connectivity and Economic Support Services.

“We can’t ask for more. Truly, the DAR is our lucky gem,” Ancero says. ☺

Knocked down but never undone

By Lyzabeth Dacula

Farmer-beneficiary Albert Linda is smiling from ear to ear again, his face glowing with satisfaction. He attributes the 180-degree turn of his life to the Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR) for extending a hand at a time when he lost everything in a snap.

Not too long ago, Albert was in distress, desperate and helpless. Super Typhoon Pablo ravaged the southern Philippines in 2012, toppling everything in its path. It left him and the people of the hardest-hit Davao Oriental practically empty-handed.

Pablo, internationally named Bopha, packed maximum sustained winds of 259 kph and gusts of up to 314 kph.

The nightmare tormented Albert for some time.

The mere mention of the super typhoon was enough to make him flinch in fear.

Still, Albert was lucky that his wife and two children were unharmed from all the destruction. "They were the ones who kept me going and helped me weather the storm," he said.

At the same time, DAR and other Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP)-implementing agencies came to his rescue, providing him and his fellow farmers with various livelihood projects to get them back on their feet.

"I ventured into vermiculture composting through the Payapa at Masaganang Pamayanan (Pamana) Project," Albert said.

With farm inputs, seedlings, and farm animals provided by the government, Albert was able to return to planting rice and vegetables in his two-hectare farm lot in Barangay San Antonio, Cateel, Davao Oriental. And through sheer determination, Albert managed to recover what he lost.

"Today, my average annual income from rice cropping and goat and swine dispersal is P258,000. In vermiculture composting, I've been earning an average of P36,000 and enjoying a monthly income of 24,500," he said.

He has also started working on another hectare of rice farm. The said lot was pawned to him by a neighbor.

With his newfound fortune,

Albert was able to build a house and buy household appliances.

But more than the material gains, he is most grateful to be able to send his children back to school. He also shoulders his nephew's monthly allowance for school.

"I've never dreamt of enjoying the kind of life I have now. I owe everything to God Almighty and to all government agencies, especially the DAR, for helping us get through the darkest night of our life," Albert said.

"To the DAR and the other government agencies, we will forever be grateful to you for all the support you extended to us, especially after Super Typhoon Pablo destroyed our community," Albert said. ☺



Balitang DAR

Cleon Lester G. Chavez
Editor-in-Chief

Kelvin Angelo R. Paulino
Editorial Consultant

Richard B. Gallardo
Senior Writer

Francis Xavier A. De La Rosa
John Cleine D.G. Gomez
Layout and Design

Balitang DAR is published quarterly by the
Department of Agrarian Reform
Public Assistance and Media Relations Service