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NEW WAVE OF FARMERS

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Contents

ABOUT THE COVER

Our new brand of farmers comes from different backgrounds. Each farmer has his/her own story worth telling. Collectively, they present new waves of ideas, of innovations, of passion, and of inspiration. The young ones and the young once have proven that agriculture transcends prejudice, culture, status, and generation, even time.

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EDITOR'S NOTE

Farmers we DON'T See

Several years back, this magazine put up an issue on *"Who is the Pinoy rice farmer?"* The magazine then carried random stories of retirees, rebel returnees, and some entrepreneurs. Now, behold the many changes that push us to rethink the mettle and characteristics of new rice farmers.

From where we sit, we can think of at least three categories: the literally young farmers—high school or even elementary students; the not young, but have just started with farming such as the retirees or the *balikbayan* OFWs; and those who do not belong to either group. They are of legal age, and have all of a sudden found themselves wanting to venture into farming. They are the innovators—people who may have taken short courses in agriculture, and they may not be in the rural areas. They are probably in the urban jungle trying to make do with their container gardening, stretching their imaginations to make agriculture possible right in their condominium units either through aquaponics or vertical farming.

While the land for agriculture may have significantly shrunk, it can be surmised that imaginative agricultural minds have inexorably increased. We do have the geeks, the tillers, the businesspeople, the seekers— all trying to retrace their steps back to rice farming or agriculture in general. They are not in conflict with the law.

This new wave of rice farmers offers exciting possibilities for all of us. This requires new modes of engagement and policies. For instance, this means creative ways to engage young farmers. Traditional extension modes may not be the right fit for them. This offers fertile ground for research. The retirees, the returning OFWs—what do we have for them? Research shows average age of returnees is 39 years old. Pretty young and able!

In South Korea, they have the Return to Farm initiative, which aims to engage those who have expressed desire to farm. Training programs are offered for them. The third category of farmers requires a totally different form of engagement. Just like the first category, the question on how they should be engaged persists. These are highly passionate people, creative, and the "would-move-heaven-and-earth" type just to make farming possible. How can they be attended to? What are the policies or politics that should be in place that will cultivate and nurture this kind of thinking? Is the Geek Institute on Rice Farming in the right direction?

This issue of the magazine documents just quite a bit of the humongous creativity and passion in farming. These are nonconventional farmers. If they don't get what they like, they like what they get. These are people who, with some push and support, will help transform our rice-farming communities, hopefully, for the better.

PhilRice wins in journ tilt

The Philippine Agricultural Journalists, Inc. (PAJ) and San Miguel Corporation have recognized anew PhilRice's communication thrusts during the December 2014 awarding event in Manila. It will be recalled that in 2009, PhilRice won the Agri Magazine category.

With *The Manila Times* and *Philippine Star* in the lead, the *Binhi* Awards "honor the continuing efforts of print and broadcast journalists for their reportage on the major developments and issues in the country's agriculture, fisheries, environment, food, and agribusiness sectors."

PAJ cited "National Year of Rice (NYR) 2013" as Best Agricultural Information and Media Campaign, which PhilRice orchestrated. The segments PhilRice aired on "*Bagong Sigla sa Agrikultura*" of the DA-RFO3 won as Best Agricultural Radio Program.

NYR 2013 was a national advocacy campaign that highlighted the role of the farmers, consumers, and decision makers in achieving rice self-sufficiency.

In support of the *Food Staples Sufficiency Program*, NYR 2013 encouraged the public to consume other food staples such as *kamote* and corn; eat brown rice; and value the hard work of farmers, by not wasting a single grain of rice.

The winning broadcast segments featured the El Niño-ready rice varieties, reduced tillage practices, and integrated crop management that can help farmers cope with climate change.

Former agri-secretary Dr. William D. Dar was guest speaker during the awarding ceremony. He was honored for his work as director general of the International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT) in India where he served since 1999. *The Manila Bulletin* says he was cited for redirecting the institute's emphasis from research for the sake of researching, to research that would actually benefit small farmers.

Dar introduced four pillars of agriculture that he developed at ICRISAT: including farmers as part of the process of development; science-based farming; resilient agriculture that responds to climate change; and a market orientation focused on making farming a profitable business.

Dar encouraged *Pinoy* farmers to use certified and hybrid rice seeds, and improve soil health. In his speech, he called for a system that will readily provide seeds to farmers who are victims of typhoons and other calamities.

"Climate change is here, and we have to build up our capacities to cope with this," he said.

"Sustainability must be a key value applied across all these pillars. We must not increase productivity if it is only going to damage the environment. All advancements are a balancing act, but we must have the long-term vision in place and then nurture the progress every step of the way," Dar said.
| **CHARISMA LOVE B. GADO**

PhilRice staff members reap awards

Bureau of Agricultural Research (BAR) 26th National Research Symposium:

Rodel Bulatao, Jody Chaves, and Marissa Romero (Grand slam winners of AFMA Best R&D Paper Gold Award and Best Poster R&D Gold Award)

Norvie Manigbas, Luvina Madrid, Corazon Cardenas, Evelyn Ladia, and Fernando Enriquez (Winners of AFMA Best R&D Bronze Award)

Victoria Lapitan, Katrina Leslie Nicolas, and Eufemio Rasco Jr. (Finalists for AFMA Best R&D Paper Award)

Science City of Muñoz Teachers and Employees' Night awardees:

Eufemio Rasco, Jr.
For his dedication and strong leadership as one of the science pillars of the City, thereby contributing to the development, growth, and prestige of the Science City of Muñoz.

Thelma Padolina
2014 Senadhira Rice Research Award

Riza Ramos
2014 Distinguished UPLB Alumna

PhilRice Executive Director Dr. Eufemio T. Rasco, Jr. (2nd from right) with the officials of Biotech Japan Corporation

Testing rice for processing tech

PhilRice will test local rice varieties for a food processing application that produces low-protein rice, a healthier alternative for people suffering from kidney disease and diabetes.

The tests will use a proprietary technology of Biotech Japan Corporation, an exclusive manufacturer of plant-origin lactic acid bacteria, a naturally occurring element found in grains, vegetables, fruits, and beans that can be used to reduce protein content in milled and cooked rice.

In a meeting with officials from the Niigata-based corporation, PhilRice executive director Eufemio T. Rasco, Jr. said that the partnership is vital as production of low-protein rice is limited only to Japanese rice for now.

The Philippine Renal Disease Registry reported in 2008 that more than 1.2 million Filipinos suffer from chronic kidney disease in which 41% of the cases resulted from diabetes.

"By helping reduce the amount of protein in rice and bread, which are common staple foods, kidney patients will be able to have better qualities of life," the company stated.

An experimental facility at PhilRice in Nueva Ecija was also proposed to pilot-test the technology through the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA).

"This groundbreaking facility will enable us to learn about the technology and conduct our own research studies later on if we want to create similar products," Rasco said.

"An additional advantage of this partnership would be our people's exposure to Japanese work values in terms of quality control and assurance, plant operation, marketing strategies—the culture of continuing improvement," he added.

A follow-up meeting is scheduled in February 2015 to secure the Memorandum of Agreement among PhilRice, Biotech Japan Corporation, and JICA with a target kick-off in April. | **SHEREEN P. RAZON**

PhilRice Agusan is best branch station again

PhilRice Agusan received the top prize in the 2014 Best Station contest – an annual internal competition organized by the Institute to elevate and improve the modalities in promoting new technologies in rice production. It also aims to highlight the best-fit practices of the stations in rice R&D.

Agusan was also recognized for successfully and creatively executing the Intensified Rice-Based Agri-bio Systems (IRBAS) program in support of PhilRice's major advocacy, the Rural Transformation Movement (RTM).

RTM aims to help reduce poverty by promoting diversified farming and agri-business ventures. Nucleus estates will be put up to give farmers access to support services including training, inputs, custom services, technologies, product development and packaging, and marketing.

"I thank the PhilRice management for organizing this contest and all my colleagues for keeping our station beautiful," said Abner T. Montecalvo, station manager.

PhilRice Midsayap and Batac placed 2nd and 3rd respectively, and were cited for creating a strategic research direction and for continually improving their internal systems and processes in accordance with Integrated Management Systems standards. PhilRice has three ISO certifications.

The following awards were also given: Most Improved Field Day to PhilRice Los Baños; Most Interactive Field Day to PhilRice Negros; and Most Innovative External Linkage to PhilRice Bicol.

The judges traveled across the country to evaluate each station based on the following: IRBAS (Rural Transformation Campaign Execution); level of mechanization; organization of field day; varietal demonstration; client satisfaction; innovations; internal processes and financial reports; housekeeping and safety; state of infrastructure; income generation; and station management.

The judges were Dr. Rex Navarro, former director for communications of the International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT); Dr. Genaro San Valentin and Thelma Padolina, PhilRice consultants; Charlene Tan, founder of Good Food Community; and Donald Mateo, from the Philippine Center for Postharvest Development and Mechanization (PHilMech).

PhilRice Agusan had earlier received the Best Field Day (2011) and Best Station (2013) awards. | **MARY GRACE M. NIDOY**

VOX POP

WE ASKED SEVERAL YOUNG PEOPLE WHAT WOULD CONVINCE THEM TO VENTURE IN RICE FARMING. HERE'S WHAT THEY SAID.

KATHERINE P. BALMEO

DANA JANE DICAG
[15, Panan, Botolan, Zambales]

"If more information about the importance of rice would be disseminated, and they'll include it in the school's curriculum, then maybe that would convince me to venture in rice farming."

MAUREEN KRIS S. NAPILA
[14, Maitum, Sarangani]

"Rice farming is difficult because it is exhausting. I'll also be exposed under the sun. Perhaps if I enjoy the time, and do it with my friends, then I will be able to bear the heat and tiredness."

CHRISTIAN JOEFRREY BALINTEC
[18, Claveria, Cagayan]

"I'd be enticed to farm if I see farmers getting higher rice yield."

JEFFERSON S. MANGURALI
[16, Libon, Albay]

"In Japan, farmers are wealthy because of geographical factors and proper governance, unlike in the Philippines. How I wish our government will also do the same so that farmers' efforts would turn into something positive, encouraging, and fulfilling. This is a big factor that can convince me to engage in farming."

ANGELICA REONISTO
[15, Libon, Albay]

"There were many times when our farmers incurred losses in their farming because of the calamities that usually visit our place. I think if they use the modern farming technologies and apply the proper farm management, the losses will be avoided even if typhoon comes."

JHYRUS JAMES PANGILINAN
[17, Cabanatuan City, Nueva Ecija]

"If there will be modern machines and gadgets for farm operations and monitoring to make rice farming more comfortable, then I'd be convinced. I believe that rice farming is important in our country but it requires heavy work."

Fresh FORCES in Farming

MYRIAM G. LAYAOEN

Ana Sibayan uses a pen and some sheets of paper to prepare for her presentation. She is about to face more than 300 scientists, extension workers, policy makers, academicians, among other participants in a prestigious international conference on agriculture and rural development. Her topic – attracting the youth to engage in agriculture.

At 25, Ana is one of the youngest farmer-leaders in the country. In her hometown Victoria in Mindoro Oriental, she juggles her time between farming and studying to become a teacher, as she devotes most of it to encouraging young individuals to cultivate land.

Deciding to farm, Sibayan's choices in life are rather rare compared to most of the youth her age.

> "I see how we survive in our town and farming is definitely something we can't live without. I want the younger generation to realize their worth in feeding us. We, the youth, have a crucial role to play," says the Mindoro State College of Agriculture and Technology sophomore.

NUMBERS SPEAK

Looking at global figures on youth engagement in agriculture, Ana is indeed one in a million. Although a lot of young people aged 15-40 have shown interest in farming, they are just a small portion of the population.

The International Labor Organization (ILO) reported in 2014 that agriculture accounts for more than 32% of the world's employment, and 39% in Asia and the Pacific's developing countries. Yet, agriculture remains at the bottom of the youth's most preferred jobs list. They look at agriculture as the "past and antithesis of progress," the ILO contends.

African countries carry a major burden in handling more than 60% of their unemployed people – the youth. A burgeoning 72% of their youth live on barely US$2 or P90 a day even as their agriculture sector offers vast job opportunities for them.

The Food and Agriculture Organization saw the need for investment planning to "adequately reflect youth employment issues and consider explicit youth employment promotion programs" including adoption of postharvest value addition and innovation on labor-saving technologies.

Official Philippine statistics reported in 2012 more than 34% of the population aged 15 and above were thriving on agriculture. The youth comprised 45% of the country's workforce in 2013. Of the nearly 20 million youth, 16% are still unemployed.

The irony of youth unemployment is magnified by the fact that most of them live in agricultural countries. However, farming is always associated with poverty and ancientness. Instead of staying in rural agricultural communities, the young people tend to migrate to cities.

The education sector is not spared. In UP Los Baños alone, enrolment in agriculture-related courses has sharply declined to 4.7% compared with 51% in the 1980s. Most schools that offer agriculture courses suffer from the same malady.

With the farmers who produce food all over the world aging every second, this situation seriously rings an alarm.

PUSH AND PULL

The Asian Farmers' Association (AFA) believes that the youth in the region find farming as the sure way to get their hands rough and dirty.

"For the youth, there is no pride and dignity in farming. It is an unstable work, with low income and high risk. For the young people, rural life is also boring," the AFA report noted.

AFA also named access to land, capital, credit, and support services as the key element that convinces the youth to farm. Children are affected by the hardships their farmer-parents go through to sustain a living.

While youth migration to the cities increasingly threatens food production, some scholars are exploring ways to encourage and maintain youth involvement in agriculture.

In a study on youth outmigration, Jaime Manalo IV of PhilRice and Elske Van de Fliert of the University of Queensland in Australia identified the factors that trigger and sustain youth exodus from rural to urban areas. Their paper detailed how involvement in actual crop production, personal perception on farming, parents' dream job for their children, and education can help shape the youth's decision to move to the cities. Curiously, many of the youth are inclined to go back to the farm when they retire.

"While intentions to migrate were high, young individuals had a strong desire to remain connected to their family's farms. Hence, policy makers would do well to assist those who leave the rural areas and return after some time," Manalo said.

Policies are set to attract the youth to agriculture. Aside from RA 8044 known as the *Youth in Nation-Building Act* that serves as pillar of support for the youth, the Philippine government has been devising incentives for smallholder farmers, including the women and the youth.

The Agricultural Training Institute resorts to the 4-H Club as an informal teaching modality for the youth in agriculture. PhilRice wages the Infomediary campaign that mobilizes high school students as information catalysts. The Departments of Agriculture, Agrarian Reform, and Trade and Industry also rear incentive schemes to further draw the youth to farm.

MULTIPLIED POTENTIALS

Various organizations recognize the role of the youth in development advocacies. Youngsters are prime information movers in the community and are the future hands of food production.

"Equal attention should also be given to urban migrants who may not return to rural areas but are willing to invest in farming to employ their poor relatives. Migrants can often raise the resources needed to finance the input-intensive rice farming operations," Manalo and Van de Fliert said.

Careers in agriculture abound from the farm itself to research and development, education and extension, and agricultural entrepreneurship. Agriculture professionals can attest to the many options the field can offer.

To encourage strong youth participation in agriculture, AFA-Philippines pushes for the *Magna Carta of Young Farmers*. The advocacy promotes and protects the rights of young farmers, establishes sound programs for them, institutionalizes their representation in agricultural policy-making bodies, and defines discrimination against them.

Despite the complications in the higher level of decision-making on interventions, Ana Sibayan would still want the youth to return to farming.

"My hands-on experience in the farm and exposure to youth activities open my eyes on the real issues concerning the youth. We need training, and be provided with basic resources to farm. There's nothing wrong in getting dirty hands when you feed the world using the same hands," Sibayan said.

The current status of the youth in agriculture challenges us to build a new wave of farmers who are empowered, productive, resilient, and prosperous. How then can it be addressed? The so-called technological supermarket must always offer "new arrivals."

Income, meaning, sense of pride – that's how Ana Sibayan reflects on the matter.

the path Less Trodden

MA. VICTORIA STEPHANE G. ASIO

With the development of other sector areas and the increasing demand for non-agriculture courses, students have become less interested in pursuing agriculture as career.

But for Visayas State University (VSU) soil science instructor Cecille Marie O. Quiñones, choosing agriculture was a smart move.

> I took up agriculture as most of my classmates were into nursing or information technology. I took the risk, and I didn't regret my decision." - Cecille Marie O. Quiñones

MORE THAN JUST FARMING

Agriculture isn't just about farming.

For Carlos Paul C. Pedracio, Central Luzon State University (CLSU) graduate and 2012 agriboard 8th placer, he took up agriculture because of its wide range of specializations. "You will have to learn about crop production, soil and water management, livestock, and even marketing – every aspect related to agriculture."

There are countless opportunities for students and graduates. "Students can apply for scholarships both here and abroad, especially now that we have the ASEAN integration," says Dr. Maria Cristeta N. Cuaresma of the Southeast Asian Regional Center for Graduate Study and Research in Agriculture (SEARCA).

"There is a high demand for agriculture graduates especially from corporations and research institutions, says Dr. Federico O. Perez, dean of the College of Agriculture (CA) at CLSU.

For Dr. Domingo Angeles, dean of UP Los Baños-CA, graduates can go into research and development, instruction, chemical or food processing, or multi-national companies involved in the food business, and many others. "They can also be agriculture entrepreneurs or agripreneurs as we now call them," adds Angeles.

Working in the agriculture sector also has travel perks. "We don't just sit in the office. We travel a lot, and we get to meet people whom we can partner with in the future," says Nic Oswald M. Borines, agriculture board exam topnotcher.

"There really are a lot of opportunities for agriculture students, and it is just up to them to discover these," Angeles emphasizes.

KEEPING UP WITH FUTURE NEEDS

The agricultural environment is changing and with it comes new sets of competencies needed to address new challenges.

"CHED is doing everything to suit the curricular program to develop the agriculture sector. There's the establishment of the National Agriculture and Fisheries Education System (NAFES), which assists in upgrading facilities and finding opportunities for state universities and colleges. It also aims to address future challenges of the agri education system," Perez says.

With the new curriculum, the agriculturist possesses knowledge and skills in different disciplines. "We are revising the curriculum to be at par with the curricular offerings of other universities abroad," Angeles says.

"This is what we call competency-based curriculum. The student will not only have extensive knowledge of his major field but also of other fields," Perez estimates.

The new BSA curriculum also features certificate programs that are in accordance withTechnical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) training regulations.

Entrepreneurship is also a skill that universities teach students. "Instead of finding a job, the agri graduate provides jobs for others," Angeles explains.

WAYS FORWARD

"We have to push programs in agriculture, and this can only be done with government support," Perez emphasizes.

PhilRice, Agricultural Training Institute (ATI), and International Rice Research Institute (IRRI), through project IPaD (*Improving Technology Promotion and Delivery through Capability Enhancement of Next-Gen Rice Extension Professionals and Other Intermediaries*) of the DA Rice Program provide non-degree training opportunities to agriculture extension intermediaries, including those in the academe.

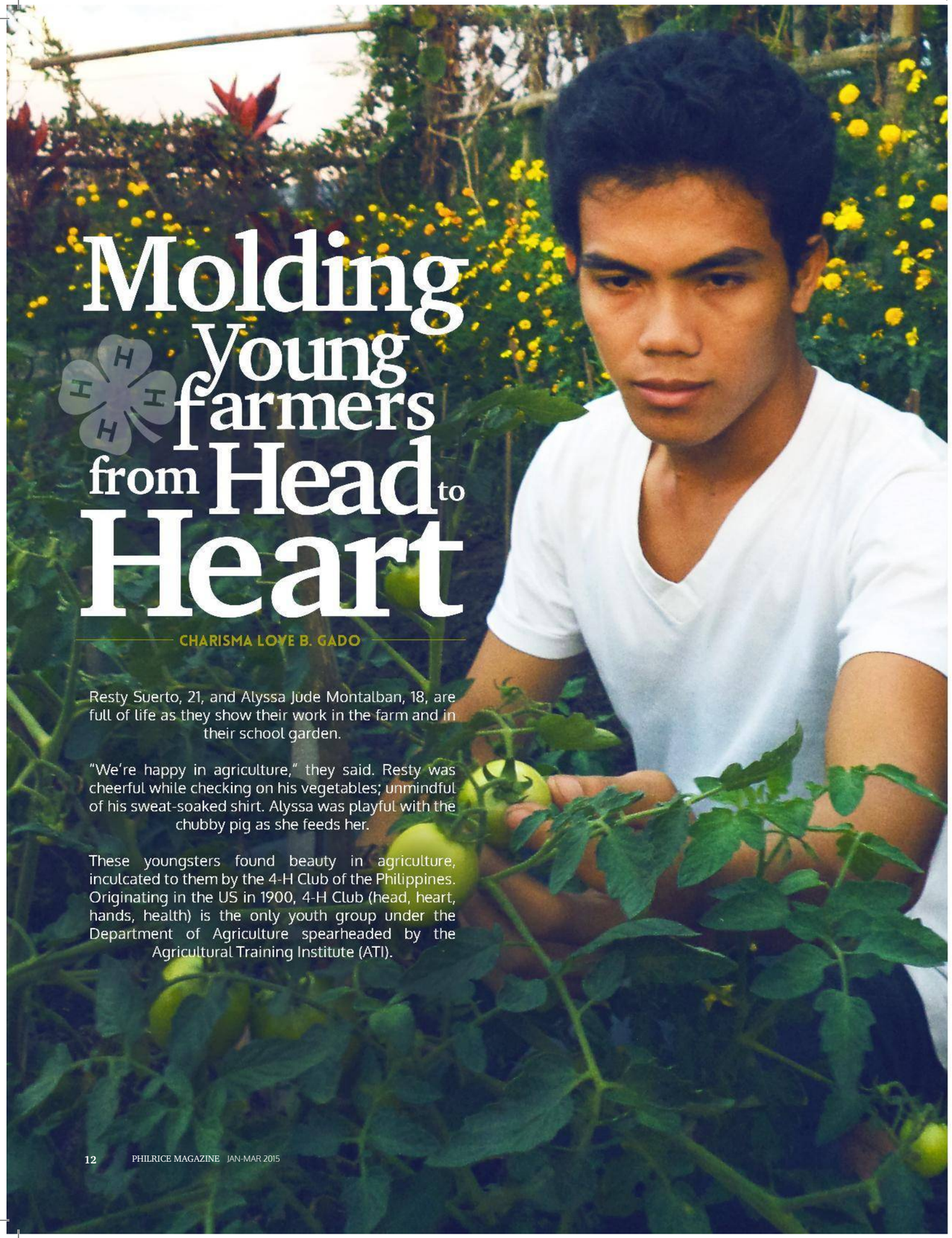
"We also conduct activities to introduce them to various ICT-based agri tools and resources developed by PhilRice, ATI, and IRRI," says Dr. Karen Eloisa T. Barroga, project lead.

While the government plays important roles in agricultural sustainability, key players (farmers, extension workers etc.) and stakeholders should also be involved. However, many of these existing key players are already ageing.

"We need to bring more young people into the sector," says Dr. Eduardo Jimmy P. Quilang, PhilRice acting deputy executive director for development.

"They will have to realize that the country's future is in agriculture and that now is the perfect time to pursue it," Quilang adds.

We feature the literally young farmers – students and youth in the minority who are the usual targets of some extension modalities and development programs. Their stories present a kind of agriculture that defies culture and age.



Molding Young farmers from Head to Heart

CHARISMA LOVE B. GADO

Resty Suerto, 21, and Alyssa Jude Montalban, 18, are full of life as they show their work in the farm and in their school garden.

"We're happy in agriculture," they said. Resty was cheerful while checking on his vegetables; unmindful of his sweat-soaked shirt. Alyssa was playful with the chubby pig as she feeds her.

These youngsters found beauty in agriculture, inculcated to them by the 4-H Club of the Philippines. Originating in the US in 1900, 4-H Club (head, heart, hands, health) is the only youth group under the Department of Agriculture spearheaded by the Agricultural Training Institute (ATI).

On its 62nd year, ATI's Alice Nebreja and Vianney Ojerio said the country's 4-H Club has about 84,000 members aged 10-30 years old. As part of its Youth Development Program, ATI supports the organization through scholarships for the ladderized courses in Agripreneurship, capacity enhancement, and entrepreneurial livelihood projects.

"AGREE CULTURE"

An idealist, Resty, *2014 Outstanding Young Farmer* from Bago City, Negros Occidental, may disagree with popular opinions. But when it comes to agriculture, he agrees with his trainers in the 4-H Club and the extension workers who help him manage his family's 2-ha farm lot.

A farmer for 4 years, Resty is a recipient of ATI's scholarship for Diploma in Agricultural Entrpreneurship and of the *2015 Young Filipino Farmers' Training Program*, an 8-month study in Japan on farm techniques and agricultural management.

"I turned to farming when I dropped out of college. A failing grade did not stop me from wanting to help our family and to be of service to the community," the second child in a brood of six said.

Based on the Commission on Higher Education's 2008 data, dropout rate among college students has reached an alarming rate of 83.7%. Data show that the country is producing 2.13 million college dropouts annually while graduates are about 500,000 only.

Although out-of-school, Resty said that his parents and friends are proud of him as he has become a good example for the youth in their community. The vice president and officer-in-charge of the Federation of 4-H Clubs in Negros Occidental, learned most of his farming techniques from the Club-sponsored training programs. He applies the latest recommendations from land preparation to harvesting, organic farming, and rice-duck system.

With his exposure trips to successful farms, moreover, Resty saw the potential of farming.

"In less than a hectare, farmers can earn more than P1M from livestock. My earning in 1.5 ha is only about P500,000, but I know with right strategy, I can raise my income," he figures out with confidence.

Will his being a college dropout stop him from earning more? Based on the 2014 Forbes Billionaires List, 63 of the 400 wealthiest people on earth are college dropouts.

"My greatest dream is for Filipino farmers to be as progressive as the farmers in developed countries. Psychological inhibitions are stopping farmers to prosper. They are faced with the greatest challenge: that is to change their mindset. We have new farm technologies but they have yet to be adapted or adopted. This is where we, the young farmers, will position ourselves. We will show to them that farmers have more potentials than we can imagine. Farmers can do and earn more, even gain millions, if we will just open our mind," he said.

AGRI COOL, SURE

As Resty spreads the "gospel" of agriculture among the youth and fellow farmers, the Cabatuan National Comprehensive High School Young Farmers 4-H Club in Iloilo conducts social work by sharing the produce from their school garden. The organization received the *Outstanding Young Farmers' Organization* award during the *2012 Gawad Saka* Regional Search.

"Through agriculture, we help improve the nutrition of the 'severely wasted' children in our nearby villages and in our school as some students go to school without breakfast and have to walk 15-20 km so as not to miss their classes. We have feeding programs every week and had set up the Healthylicious Food Court, where 4-H Club members sell nutritious snacks," Alyssa, the Club president said.

In their feeding program, Alyssa's group and their adviser, Veronica Tomulto, serve kalamansi juice with extracted *kamote* or roselle leaves, veggie burgers with *lupo* – an indigenous weed, malunggay muffins, and *pichi-pichi* (gelatinous dessert made from cassava and sugar). The 4-H Club members, mostly under the technical vocational curriculum, prepare the food.

Members learned to prepare food through ATI-funded training programs. They also trained on food trades, piggery and broiler production, proposal writing, basic accounting, and product packaging and marketing.

"We only started with 40 members when we were re-organized in 2009. Now, we are 300 and our accomplishments in the community are recognized by our mayor," she said.

The group used to ask for funding for their activities from the Mayor's Office, but by managing their projects in such a way that they will generate income, their group now has enough funds for their annual Christmas gift-giving spree to poor communities and scholarship program. The group also sent out donations to the victims of typhoon Yolanda in 2013.

While they are busy with food trades and community work, Alyssa said that their membership in the 4-H Club made them appreciate the value of agriculture.

"Before joining 4 years ago, I did not have an idea on how farming or agriculture was like. Encouraged by what I learned from the Club, I bought a piglet for P2,500 – a capital I gained from selling vegetable *lumpia* in our Healthylicious Food Court. After 4 months, the pig was sold at P5,000. I thought then that it's quite easy to get money from agriculture. The acknowledgement receipt of the sales is framed in my room," she shared.

Alyssa, high school valedictorian, who may be taking up a nursing course, said that the training she had with the 4-H Club made her more sensitive to farm workers' needs and she would easily relate to her future farmer-patients.

"I know how hard it is to work in the farm. That is why I and the other 4-H Club members value the work of the farmers by sharing to the community the benefits of good, nutritious food," she said.

Indeed, Resty, Alyssa, and their fellow members are living up to their pledge: "I pledge my head to clearer thinking, my heart to greater loyalty, my hands to larger service, and my health to better living, for my club, my community, my country and my world."

MORE than a GarDEN

CHRISTINA A. FREDILES

It is clear with the Commission on Higher Education that enrolment in agriculture, fisheries, forestry, and veterinary medicine had declined from 85,266 in 1999 to only 49,823 in 2010.

"Most students are influenced with our modern technology leading them to take up information technology courses or any related course that will lead them to working in offices," said Margie Cabuhat, a teacher in Balagtas National Agricultural High School (BNAHS) in Bulacan.

In 2001, a "living rice museum" was born in the heart of metropolitan Manila as another way to create awareness on the importance of rice and rice farmers.

ONE AND ONLY IN THE BIG CITY

The first rice garden was then established at the Luneta Park, a joint project of PhilRice, Bureau of Plant Industry, National Parks Development Committee, and the Asia Rice Foundation.

Since then, events such as ceremonial harvesting, rice appreciation lectures, and field days happened in the area, participated in mostly by high school and elementary students.

Mitzchell T. Dela Cruz, Grade 8 student of Manuel A. Roxas High School, said that the rice garden let her see rice in a different perspective.

"There's no rice field in our area and I only see milled rice being sold in the market and on my plate, cooked. If all Filipinos, especially the youth, would realize how long it takes to produce a single grain, maybe we would no longer waste rice every time we eat," Dela Cruz said.

Mark Kenneth Barit, a high schooler from Manila, said "I realized that farmers play an important role not just in agriculture but also in our health. We need them practically three times a day."

Every year, a ceremonial harvesting is held at the Luneta Park and students learn rice production and appreciation through lectures, exhibits, and rice quiz bee competitions. The exercise aims to raise the awareness of the youth on rice production and attract them to someday venture in agriculture.

RICE GARDEN IN THE PROVINCES

To further intensify the knowledge of students on rice production, PhilRice and the Department of Education launched the Infomediary campaign in 2012.

Through this campaign, agricultural technical vocational schools established rice gardens to teach students the basics of rice production through lectures and hands-on training.

Joenablle Curilan, a student of Agusan Pequeño National High School in Butuan City, learned to identify and protect beneficial insects in the rice field such as wasps, lady beetles, and spiders.

"With the rice garden in our school, I was able to experience how to prepare the land, weed, and harvest. I was also able to share to my grandfather how to practice the Minus-One Element Technique (MOET)," she said.

MOET is a reliable, low-cost, and easy-to-use alternative to diagnose the soil nutrient status.

Orlan Rabago of BNAHS plans to take up agriculture in college. With the rice garden and through hands-on training, he was inspired to learn more about rice and one day improve the lives of farmers by increasing their yield and income.

"My father is a farmer and our lessons in farming especially the hands-on training in the rice garden equipped me to do farm activity in our own farm. I learned how to operate a hand tractor, which is important in land preparation," said Orlan.

GRADUATE "GARDENERS"

To Mitzchell, Mark, Joenablle, and Orlan, the rice garden has given them the first step in learning the rigorous work in rice production. It helped students see agriculture and rice production in a new light. For them, it is definitely more than just a garden.

> "Food security has always been high in the agenda of our country. Now that we are 100 million and counting, can we secure enough food for all of us? Is there enough agricultural labor force to suffice the need?

Strings of young ideas

JOHN GLEN S. SAROL
JAYSON C. BERTO

The Infomediary Campaign made its first step 2 years ago. Now, it's taking huge strides.

With its initiative to mobilize high school students to serve as information providers in their rice-farming communities—it treks on as it continues to involve over a hundred schools nationwide.

Certainly, the campaign has gone a long way.

Eventful enough, in fact, that several practices can now be emulated toward engaging young people in agriculture.

BEST-FIT PRACTICES

The campaign team draws added inspiration from strings of innovative ideas growing from teachers among participating schools.

For certain teachers in Davao Oriental, Kalinga, Albay, and Negros Oriental, the best way to re-echo the campaign is through the Parents and Teachers Association (PTA) meetings.

The info-drive on Climate Change and Rice Production module was performed in Occidental Mindoro and Negros Oriental where students relayed to farmers modern technologies in rice farming such as the Minus-One-Element Technique (MOET), Leaf Color Chart (LCC), and controlled irrigation, among others.

Elizabeth Pajarillo, a crop production teacher in Mindoro Occidental, said that exposing students in community-based activities is a good opportunity for farmers to appreciate tips on rice production coming from them.

In some cases, teachers were clever enough to maximize the use of ICTs in promoting the campaign's components.

This is evident in Samar and Bulacan where students promoted the PhilRice Text Center (PTC) by posting bond paper-sized campaign materials in public places inside and outside their campuses.

The campaign also relies upon good collaboration among Internet and Computer Fundamentals (ICF) and other instructors.

In Claveria Rural Vocational School in Cagayan, for instance, the crop protection teacher and the ICF instructor developed a computer-based quiz on infomediary campaign-related topics. "We thought of a way to make the campaign much more challenging and exciting.

We've developed the Nutri E-Quiz featuring PhilRice's Infomediary Campaign and the Pinoy Rice Knowledge Bank (Pinoy Rice). Right now, it's the second year of E-quiz implementation," Allan Tomas, the quiz developer said.

While innovative campaign methods are being executed in most schools, ripples of information are equally helpful.

In Sarangani, for instance, Malalag National High School (MNHS) disseminated the campaign by sharing the learning modules as well as some seeds to its neighboring schools.

"We still plan to reach out to other schools and share modules on rice production. This is our way of contributing to the campaign since it has been helpful for us. This would also address the lack of textbooks on rice production," Onofre Labrador, MNHS instructor said.

MNHS has thus far reached out to Maguiling NHS, Wali Integrated School, and Salakit NHS, all in Sarangani.

In Bulacan, Balagtas National Agricultural High School integrates rice production through essays in English and Filipino subjects. The key school officials are also supportive of the campaign.

To encourage other schools to replicate these practices, the campaign team has created a Facebook group where representatives of Infomediary campaign-participating schools can post all activities they are doing.

"Technically, however, it is not much about replicating the best-fit practices. Such practices require that we work hard to determine which strategies will work best given specific development contexts. Remember, there's no one-size-fits-all approach in implementing development initiatives. It is all about asking and seeing from there which strategies will work best," Jaime Manalo IV, the campaign lead clarified.

OUTCOMES

From the evaluation, 94% of the students performed their role as infomediaries either by sending text messages to PTC, searching information from the Pinoy Rice, or reading publications on rice from their school libraries.

Meanwhile, 41% of them reported their parents and other farmers believed in their recommendations.

Collaboration with local government units also exists, as reports in Albay show local officials and farmers attending the PTA meetings. In Cagayan, a local executive lent land for the rice garden in Claveria.

The doubts on whether farmers would believe students who have inadequate experience on rice farming are now being slowly erased.

Across sites, the students reported their parents believed them. An infomediary in Bulacan, for instance, managed to convince her father and uncle to minimize the use of pesticides in their fields after she shared with them the concept of harmful and helpful organisms.

"Before, I just sprayed on every insect I saw in the farm. Now, I try to avoid spraying on helpful organisms," Marcelo Hernandez, farmer-parent, said in Filipino.

Farmers from nearby areas have asked for seeds from the participating schools. This has been the case in Cagayan, Davao Oriental, and Sarangani. Certified seeds have 10% yield advantage over home-saved seeds being used by some farmers.

Through field days, farmers are introduced to the PhilRice-produced seeds. They then see the schools as sources not only of information but also of seeds.

By the end of the day, so to speak, the infomediary campaign is still young and is equally innovative as the young generation.

With the strings of ideas from its partners, active involvement of the youth, plus the heart that beats for farming, the campaign is just waiting to take its next big leap.

Bringing New Technologies in the Uplands

APRIL M. JOSE

Every day, Margie Baclay, 21, hopes to have a bountiful harvest as this means more money to buy rice and send her two children to school.

The young farmer and single parent belongs to the Aeta community that lives in the mountains of Brgy. Sta. Rosa, Bamban, Tarlac.

> Margie and her community are able to balance new and old practices. The Aetas have a way of adopting new technologies while keeping their identity intact. They are not afraid of change because they know how to be a conduit of the old and the new. They become better through knowledge acquisition but still remain who they are – that for me is a good example of an unconventional farmer." - Julian Macadamia

Struggling to make both ends meet, Margie had to stop her elementary education and resorted to what most people in the rural areas cling on – farming. For almost a decade now, she has been planting banana, *gabi*, papaya, sugar cane, and other crops without applying fertilizers and pesticides. She relies on the richness of the soil. She believes that the eruption of Mt. Pinatubo in 1991 left their mountains with volcanic ashes that made the soil fertile.

Farming in the uplands is challenging, according to Margie. No questions asked.

"I dig the soil of a steep mountainside and pull the weeds one by one while sitting on a heap," she says.

From the mountain down to the river, she fetches water for her plants. She descends from the mountain for an hour to sell her produce and accompany her children to school. During the rainy season, the mountain trail gets slippery and dangerous. Hence, she waits for good weather to bring her produce to the market while her children stay at home. She recalls that after the eruption of the volcano, they have not cultivated upland rice due to the unavailability of seeds.

In 2013, the DA's Upland Rice Development Program reached the Aeta community and re-introduced upland rice farming. Margie's family did not hesitate on trying the new technology and started planting a 2-kg traditional rice variety known as *"Pinilisa"* in May 2014 and harvested 25 kg of seeds in October.

"I learned the science behind upland rice farming and how to make our own organic fertilizer," shares Margie. She decided to keep the seeds for mass production and share them later to their fellow farmers. Margie reports they are eager to try new agricultural technologies and revive upland rice farming in their community.

CULTURE AND IDENTITY

According to upland rice technologist Julian Macadamia of PhilRice, the Aetas are receptive to new technologies.

"Margie and her community are able to balance new and old practices. The Aetas have a way of adopting new technologies while keeping their identity intact," he says.

"The Aetas are not afraid of change because they know how to be a conduit of the old and the new. They become better through knowledge acquisition but still remain who they are – that for me is a good example of an unconventional farmer," he adds.

Rice cultivation in general is highly valued by Aetas. They acquire rice through barter or with the money they make from selling vegetables, root crops, wild fruits, or tubers to the lowlanders.

"As long as my family doesn't sleep with an empty stomach, I will be happy with what I do every day despite the challenges that we face in farming," Margie reassures herself.

The sight of her crops growing assures her that her family will have something to eat. She's surely adept in survival matters.

For her, she can't think of any way of making a living apart from tilling the land. If by chance there will be additional jobs available, she would not totally abandon the land that provides them food.

"Indeed, this land on top of the mountain is a gift to our ancestors and to us," Margie becomes emphatic and emotional.

And as the day ends, Margie sleeps with her dreams. She believes that through farming, her children will, unlike her, remain in school.

Writing a new Narrative for agriculture

MARY GRACE M. NIDOY

Agriculture is deeply personal and profoundly sentimental to Cherrie Atilano. It runs at the core of her soul that when she tells her story, her persona beams with fervor and nostalgia as she relates how her life began in her hometown Silay City, Negros Occidental.

Conceived and born in the heart of the sugarcane industry, Cherrie's journey with farmers began early. Her father was an overseer of the hacienda and manager of the sacadas (sugarcane contract farmers). Her mother handled their *sari-sari* store. When salaries were paid, her father would hold a party with the farmers in their house.

"I was the lovely little girl who would sing and dance in front of the farmers," she quips.

This is her vivid memory of her father. Cherrie was 3 years young when her father died. "We lost our father. We also lost everything."

Cherrie is youngest in a brood of five. At 6, she started working to help her mother support 11 of them – 5 are her biological children and 6 are adopted. It was hard for her having a single parent. Her mother managed their school's canteen and every 6AM she would get orders from people and cooked pancit to sell.

Despite the struggle to survive, Cherrie finished elementary on top of her class. Her mother gave them a different kind of motivation. She recalls, "In a year, we could only buy new clothes once. If you have honor at school, you get another set of clothes because you have to be on stage to receive your award."

The story of loving farmers started when Cherrie was yet too young to understand matters that mattered most.

She didn't have playmates growing up because her friends had to work at the sugarcane fields. Her mother did not allow her to work in the farm but one weekend, she escaped with her friends and learned how to plant sugarcane and make fertilizer. Unknown to her mother, the farm became her playground.

"It opened my eyes to the reality. If you witness how farmers work, especially in the sugarcane fields with hundreds of hectares, they work hard but still they don't get enough," Cherrie laments.

Eventually, her mother allowed her to work in the farm. At 12, she was teaching farmers how to plant vegetables and do composting through a scholarship program focused on agriculture.
In high school, Cherrie wrote an essay about the lives of the sacadas in Negros. Sugar, according to her, is not sweet. "It's bitter for my taste because I saw how it's being planted and produced."

EMBOLDENED

Life in the hacienda made her realize the huge disparity between the rich and the poor. The strong consciousness made her question the inequality and feudal system in her province. She was ripening to become a child in conflict with the law, but she chose to grow up without raising a whimper.

"My mother would tell me that I must do well in school so that I will be the one to help the farmers," Cherrie recalls.

And Cherrie again graduated as class valedictorian in high school getting a full scholarship from the local government of Negros Occidental. The Pagkaon (food) Scholarship Program is focused on helping students taking up agriculture-related courses.

Cherrie majored in Horticulture at the Visayas State University in Baybay City, Leyte. As a working student, she tutored some children of her professors and sold food and beauty products to help support her education. Her hard work paid off and finished as Magna Cum Laude in 2007. Her moment has come, she had thought.

"I had a lot of money after graduation because all the awards I received came with cash," she says in jest.

It is no surprise that Cherrie was also chosen as one of the Ten Outstanding Students of the Philippines (TOSP). Tony Meloto of Gawad Kalinga (GK) was one of the judges in the competition and that's how Cherrie and Meloto met.

After working for Ayala Land for less than a year, Cherrie was invited to work for the development of GK's Enchanted Farm in Angat, Bulacan. It is where she established Agricool – a program that empowers young people and encourages them to venture in agriculture.

Heeding the call of her passion, Cherrie turned down her Fulbright Scholarship – an honor given to the crème de la crème – eight months before her graduate studies would have started in the US. Again, she chose to become fluent in agricultural development matters not by earning a master's degree but by dirtying her hands. Her defining moment has come, she was certain.

She believes that young farmers like her are the future of agriculture because they are more innovative and receptive. They have access to technology on how to improve the farming communities that have been left behind for so long.

IN LOVE

At 28, Cherrie has been told a lot of times that she's dealing with a deep-rooted societal scandal.

> "You need to be crazy enough to fall in love with farming. And it's good to be crazy and fall in love with this country," she whispers.

Her love for agriculture doesn't seem to be biodegradable. It is actually retroactive.

Farmers, for her, are an endangered species. It isn't just about empowering them but also enabling them to be decision makers. "I always say that Filipino farmers are world-class. When we so describe ourselves, we need to exhibit excellence and discipline. I saw all these qualities in every farmer that I have met." Cherrie's dream for Filipino farmers is to connect them not just to the supply chain but to the entire value chain. "I talk of value in terms of creating products and putting value and restoring their dignity as not just members of the workforce but also the backbone of the economy."

What is her advice to the children of farmers? "They must stay where the land is. The two biggest resources of this country are land and humans. Let's go back where the land is. When you tickle the soil, it can give you money. We are fueling our country in terms of growth and development."

With her journey, Cherrie is writing a new narrative for agriculture – a kind of story that inspires and brings about positive change.

Modern Agriculturists

ASHLEE P. CANILANG
ANDREI B. LANUZA

> "Although we currently are not meeting the agricultural needs in our country, we believe that if we continue on this path and improve our agriculture by providing more support, then we aren't too far away from being self-sustaining."
> - Ryan Aguas

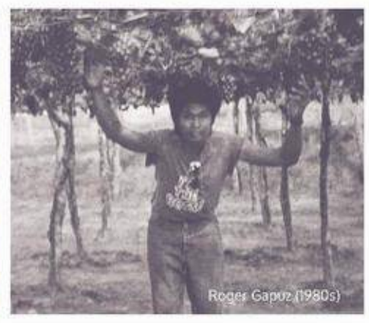
Photo Source: www.facebook.com/BkOrganics

Illian Pascual (left) and Enzo Pinga (right) at the BK Organics farm

Ryan Aguas explains hydroponics to BK Organics farm visitors

Danica Gapuz

Roger Gapuz



Roger Gapuz (1980s)

"Ayaw ko kumuha ng agriculture [course]. Ano makukuha kong trabaho dyan?" (I don't want to take up Agriculture. What job can I possibly get with it?).

Admit it, many of us must have heard or read about this statement or its variant somewhere in time. The thought of working in agriculture or on a farm could be alien to young urban and rural Filipinos.

Dr. Eduardo Bagtang, president of the Kalinga-Apayao State College, stated in an interview with *The Manila Times* that the main reason why the children of farmers do not want to take on agriculture-related professions is that they've seen how their parents toil in the field day after day but barely able to make ends meet. Even our college education system is primarily focused on preparing the youth for employment, not entrepreneurship.

Fortunately, not all Filipino youngsters have lost faith in agriculture.

CHANGING THE GAME

Friends Ryan Aguas, Enzo Pinga, and Illian Pascual, while studying abroad, met in New York City to discuss plans of starting an agriculture-related business in the Philippines when they return. They wanted to create an impact by helping Filipino farmers and believed agriculture is the best way to go about it. Illian, a mechanical engineer, introduced them to vertical farming (aquaponics), since sustainability and green agriculture were among his interests. The trio realized that aquaponics may just be the technology they needed to pursue agriculture given that it requires no soil and is modular; the perfect setup in an urban environment where land for farming use is limited. Thus was the beginning of the *Bahay Kubo* Organics (BKO), based in Muntinlupa City.

BKO is a young social enterprise that vows to help address food security in the Philippines. They grow crops, and help communities in rural areas through capacity-building via training and education. Currently, these three guys are supplying produce mostly to friends and relatives but someday wish to expand to more clients.

"We established partnerships with many different organizations in all of our community builds, including the Fairplay for All Foundation, Mu Sigma Phi, GK Sta. Rita, Dream Project PH, Rotary Club of Bacolod South, Asia Society for Social Improvement and Sustainable Transformation (ASSIST), and Kawil Tours. The projects we do with these organizations mainly focus on engaging communities interested in learning about the technology and applying it in their own areas," says Ryan.

ALL IN THE FAMILY

Passing-the-baton best defines the Gapuz Grape Farm in Bauang, La Union. The farm started with 50 prunes of grapes through the passion and efforts of Cirillo and Roger Gapuz, father and son, during the late 1980s. During those times, grape vineyard was unpopular in the area, and a number of tourists and customers doubted the quality of the local harvest. Through the years, father-and-son tandem strove until they were able to expand their vineyard and market reach. Thus, the beginning of the Farm, now among the local tourist attractions in the municipality.

The passion and dedication to grape farming have lingered within the present generation.

The baton was passed on to Danica, the eldest daughter of Roger, a human resource graduate and currently a consultant in Makati City. Doubling as sales and marketing manager of the Gapuz Grape Farm, she also operates the vineyard's social media site.

It wasn't hard for Danica to engage in grapes despite having a stable job, as she grew up exposed to farm work. And she was not sour-graping. Through her efforts, the farm expanded and gained new clients. Thanks to social media, they now have customers in the Visayas and Mindanao; clients who are not only purchasing the fruits but also the cuttings that they grow in their own backyards.

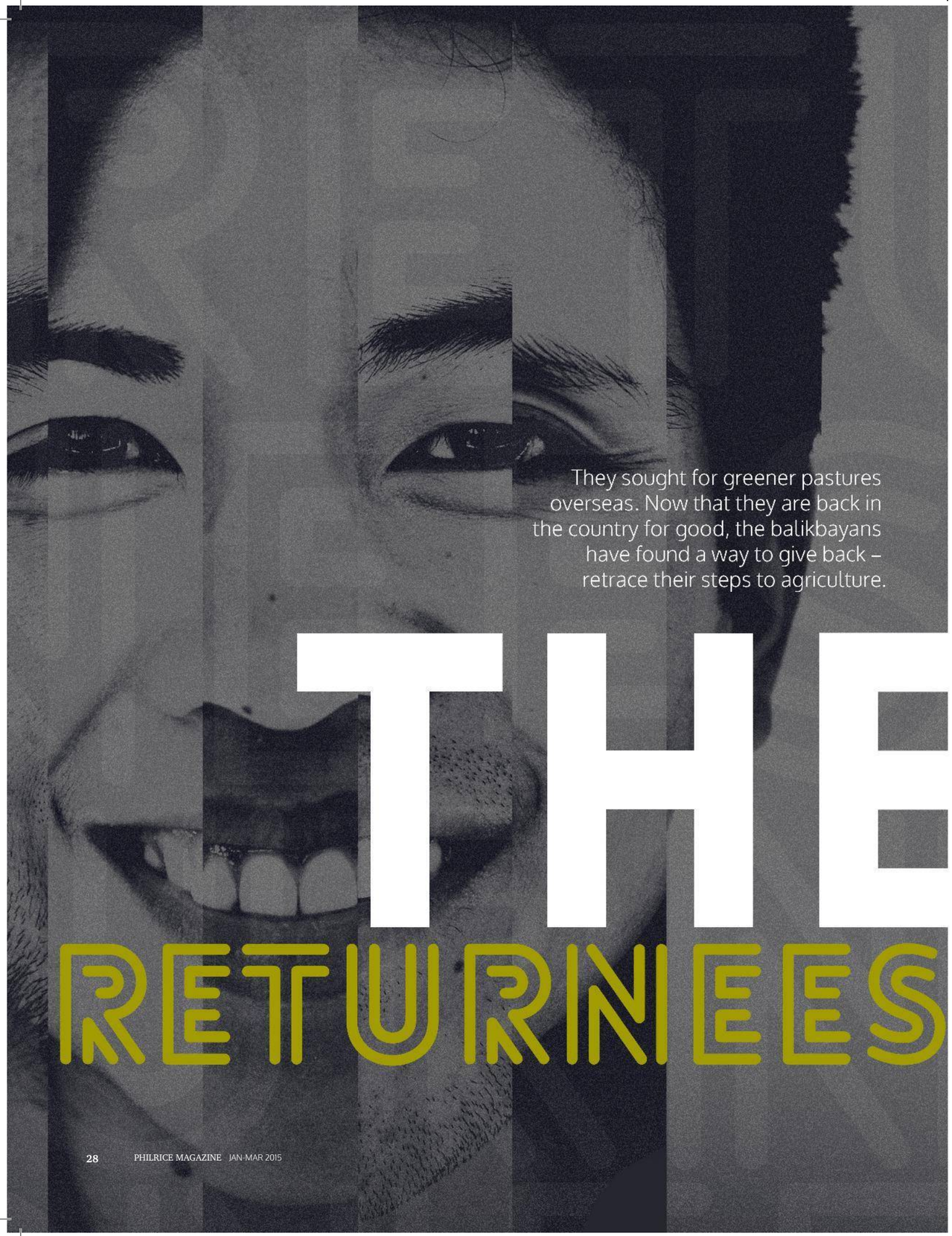
"The demand for grapes outside our locale is huge. This is why we decided to make our own social media account to help in promotion. Through it, our network stretched, and we now have customers as far as Davao City," said Danica.

Her active marketing drives paid off when the Farm was featured on national TV. As a result, Danica became one member of the Go Negosyo Young Agriprenuers, and is occasionally invited to deliver talks on radio about grape farming. The increased sales and income due to more media exposure helped the Gapuz family to purchase another piece of land in their area. According to Danica, part of the new farm will grow dragon fruit and local vegetables.

A GOLDMINE IN PLAIN SIGHT

Ryan of BKO sees Philippine agriculture as rich with potential. All people need to do is tap on the right resources. "Although we currently are not meeting the agricultural needs in our country, we believe that if we continue on this path and improve our agriculture by providing more support, then we aren't too far away from being self-sustaining," he added.

Danica agrees. "Farming and agriculture as a whole has a huge potential for generating income. Youth today should be educated that agriculture is not just having your sweat, blood, and tears flow to sustain your crops. Agriculture can be rewarding when treated as a business" she reflected. ●



Ex-OFWs find fortune in the farm

PERRY NESLYNN H. DURAN
PERRY IRISH H. DURAN

For many Filipinos, working abroad paints an image of greener pastures and endless possibilities. The challenges and aspirations such as providing well for one's family, getting out of debt, and taking hold of a brighter future fuel more than 2.2 million Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) to go and grab the opportunities offered in other countries.

For many years, Margarita Allado, Agnes Asuncion, and Sherwin Sagmit were OFWs. After working in other countries, getting used to their cultures and earning a decent salary, fate would have it that they return to their motherland, till its soil, and venture in agriculture. Not only are they balikbayans for good, but also balikbukids for the better.

PUBLIC SERVANT AND AGRIPRENEUR IN ACTION

Ever since Margarita returned from Hong Kong in 1992, she's been helping her husband manage their farm. Now, she is not only a farmer by occupation but also a public servant after being elected as councilor then Barangay Captain in Pias Norte, Currimao, Ilocos Norte.

"I first thought of what was not present in Currimao," said the Kapitana when asked why she ventured into agribusiness.

"First, I retailed rice in our community. I started with five bags of NFA rice. The demand was high so I asked my husband if he could apply for a loan. He did, and with P20,000 I bought more supply," Margarita recalled.

"I gradually saved our profit until my store expanded. One day, farmers in our place asked if we were selling anything for farming. That made us add seeds, feeds, insecticides, and fingerlings," she added.

Margarita found agriculture easy because of the exposure and training she got while she was young. Her aunt, who supported her basic studies, was a born businesswoman. That inspired her to become one.

The barangay chief plants rice in her 1.5-ha partly mortgaged land. They also plant vegetables that Margarita sells through her *sari-sari* store. When harvest is bountiful, they "export" to the nearby Batac City market.

Margarita worked for only 2 years as baby sitter of a teacher's child in Hong Kong. She was paid P9,000 per month.

"It's better to farm than work abroad to support your kids' education," swears Margarita.

AGNES' FOREVERMORE WITH DRAGON FRUIT

Agnes Asuncion was a hard-working all-around domestic helper in Hong Kong from 1982 to 2003.

While there, she attended training programs on making soap courtesy of her previous employer. Little did she know back then that such investment would help her triumph in what she does today.

The longing for family, increasing placement fees, and difficulty in finding an employer pushed Agnes to return to Ilocos Norte and start an agribusiness after receiving her long-service payment.

Agnes and her family had no savings. The investments she put in pension and educational plans went down the drain. Her husband has been doing farm work since his childhood. Agnes then listed up and participated actively in a PhilRice-JICA farmers' field school. Some science stabilized the little art in farming that she knew.

Agnes and her husband planted vegetables that they supplied to vendors who sometimes did not pay them right. They themselves then brought their harvest directly to the market.

Agnes plants rice once a year in 4,500 m^2 mainly for family consumption. They are a family of four and when times are good, they harvest 60 cavans. They sell some of it.

When her husband could no longer work in the farm, Agnes planted dragon fruit instead of vegetables. She started with only four plants. At present, the Asuncions harvest 20 kg of dragon fruit per post of four plants in 6 months from their 2,500-m^2 land that also contains rice, *kamote*, potatoes, and peanuts. They harvest twice a month. In 2014, dragon fruit sold at P100 a kilo.

For 6 years now, encouraged by the high demand and established market, Agnes has tamed the dragon fruit business – selling fruits and seedlings, and processing the fruit into wine and herbal soap. She plans to eventually have a one-stop shop. Sometimes, when demand is high and supplies are low, Agnes takes on contracted fruits to add to her earnings.

"If you are industrious, you will really earn more. What can be earned for a year as a domestic helper abroad, a person can earn in one month through agribusiness if s/he works hard," said Agnes.

"While your product is in demand, concentrate on it", advised Agnes. "I encourage our fellow Filipinos abroad to venture in agribusiness. They will have a higher income."

RECLAIMING HIS ROOTS

"An engineer by profession, a farm boy by heart" is how Sherwin Sagmit of San Fernando City, Pampanga describes himself.

Growing up in the farm, Sherwin rode carabaos, harvested mungbeans and tomatoes, and maneuvered the *'Kariton'*. During floods, he and his friends would catch fish along the rice bunds.

He would also tinker with baby birds, then return them to their nests. These experiences built up Sherwin's dormant passion for farming that empowered him to venture into agribusiness later in his life.

Sherwin took up electronics and communications engineering in 1989; worked for Motorola in Singapore in 2000, bringing his whole family with him. They all became Singaporeans and resided there for 10 years.

In 2010, Sherwin was relocated in Motorola Philippines as engineering director that earned him P200,000-P300,000 a month. However, even as an expat in his own country, he did not plan to stay in the Philippines for good.

Nine months later, the local Motorola was purchased by another international company.

Sherwin decided to accept the offered separation package and his family joined him in Pampanga. Sherwin reclaimed his Filipino citizenship and tried different businesses. He sold coffee-blending machines and consumables; and ventured into perfume-making, all in the short-term.

"In the Philippines, if something seems good, it will surely be copied and someone will offer a lower price. But if you are the source of the raw materials, you can dictate the price. So, who are the sources of raw materials? They are the farmers, the producers. That motivated me to go into farming", said Sherwin.

In June 2012, Sherwin and partners set up "29Eleven Farm Corporation," inspired by the bible verse Jeremiah 29:11 ("For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future). Currently, he is the company's CEO and President.

Initially, the company focused on producing Red Chilli Pepper- Pinatubo F1 (hybrid) variety. They failed to create a market, and some of the harvest was wasted because of improper drying practices.

Coming as a blessed twist of fate, Sherwin learned more of the Dragon Fruit Lady of the Philippines - Mrs. Edita Dacuycuy. From then on, 29Eleven produced dragon fruit as its main crop.

At present, 29Eleven supplies Landmark Makati. It has 6,000 dragon fruit posts on almost 3 hectares of land, developing 2 more hectares in Arayat, Pampanga.

"I can see only three big industries that can have good business [because they address human's basic needs]: anything that deals with land - it can be real estate or agriculture; water - it can be water purification and treatment; and energy - can be renewable energy, solar panels, wind mills, and the like," Sherwin figures out.

KURU SAKA:

Pinagbuklod ng Binhi

PERRY NESLYNN H. DURAN
PETE MAR YVES G. VILLALINO

Kwento ng mag-amang Angelito, 47 at Jonathan Gamilla, 27, ng Malayantoc, Sto. Domingo, Nueva Ecija

HALIGI NG TAHANAN AT PAGSASAKA]

Ako si Angelito, nagsimulang magsaka noong 1998. Noon ay hindi pa naman kami ganito kalago bilang seed growers. Isa hanggang dalawang ektarya lang ang aming nasasaka. Kakaunti lang ang aming nabebenta ngunit ngayon ay talagang libuhan na. Marami na rin kaming suki na tumatangkilik sa amin.

Nagtatanim na kami noong araw pa dahil magsasaka rin ang aking mga magulang. Nakikisaka lang kami dahil wala naman kaming sariling bukid noong araw. High school lang ang aking natapos. Kung hindi dahil sa pagbibinhi ay baka hindi ako nakarating sa kinalalagyan ko ngayon. Magandang pagkakitaan ang binhi. Kumikita ka na, nakatutulong ka rin sa ibang magsasaka.

Naisipan ko maging seed grower dahil sabi ng PhilRice na narito raw ang pera. Totoo nga, dahil noong una kami mag-seminar, ang hirap pa naming yayain. Tapos napaisip ako na sumali. Doon ko talaga natutuhan na sa pagbibinhi maganda ang kita.

Ang bentahan namin ng binhi ngayon ay umaabot ng P33/kilo, kaya mas mataas ang kita. Bukod sa 35 ektarya, meron pa kaming mahigit 100 ektaryang pinatatamnan na.

Kailangan sa farmer yung dagdag-ani. Dapat turuan natin sila na mag- sakripisyo at mag-ipon. Kaya kung ilan yung anak mo na nag-aaral, ganon din kalaki ang ektarya na dapat mong sinasaka. Dapat hands-on ka rin sa bukid.

BUNGA NG PAGSASAKA

Ako si Jonathan. Mahalaga ang naituro ng aking ama sa pagsasaka at pagbibinhi. Sa eskwelahan, natuto ako sa teorya at ang aking ama ang nagbigay ng "practical" at "actual" na pagtuturo. Sa eskwelahan kasi puro lang libro. Kapag practical, makikita mo talaga yung problema at dapat mong gawin.

Naging inspirasyon ko talaga ang aking ama sa pagsasaka at pagbibinhi. Dito kami umunlad. Ang aking ama dati ay nakikiporsyentohan lang at naging tricycle driver pa. Mula noong naging seed grower siya, doon nagsimula ang kita at pag- asenso.

Kung hindi sa pagsasaka hindi kami makapagpupundar ng bahay. Dito kami nagsimula. Bata pa lang ako gusto ko na talagang magsaka. Kaya nga Agriculture kinuha ko noong college. Yung mga kapatid ko hindi mahilig sa agriculture at napunta sila sa I.T. Namulat ako sa bukid at iyon na ang nakagisnan ko. Naging passion ko na ang magsaka. Kung magkakaroon ako ng anak na lalaki, tuturuan ko ng pagsasaka dahil dito may asenso. ●

the Exponent of TIME

JOY BARTOLOME A. DULDULAO

Time is the only currency he recognizes.

HIS DEADLINES ARE NOT NOW, BUT YESTERDAY.

He moves fast and has the energy of a lion. To keep the pace going, he himself deals with collaborators, partners, and officials. He trusts that his managers will keep things in order at home.

His instructions and directives are quick pulses of e-mails and text messages. The laptop, tablet, and smartphone are his extended deputies. He keeps messages to track progress. And long message threads mean people are not moving fast enough. His most repeated sentiment: time is the most wasted resource.

The march of memos and orders is also fast. And he wants them short and easy-to-grasp. His one memorable legacy perhaps to PhilRice is the re-constructed one-sentence, 30-word IMS (integrated management system) policy. Easy to memorize, easy to take to heart.

HIS DEEPLY UNPOPULAR ADVOCACY IS TO PUBLISH NOW, OR, AS EVERYONE KNOWS, PERISH.

A well-published researcher himself, he knows that you can never be a true-blue scientist without a paper to your name. He thus made publication the staple for performance evaluations. In the 2 years that the policy was instituted, papers in scientific and peer-reviewed publications jumped to levels PhilRice has never seen before.

Collaborations and funds also poured in. One change in his administration is that the private sector is viewed more as a partner than a competitor.

HE CAME AT A TIME WHEN THE WORKFORCE WAS UP FOR RESHAPING.

Though it can only be guessed if he liked being the executor of the DBM-approved rationalization plan, he had to comply. But the plan was not embraced as it was. He directed a further study of the plan, consolidation of all refinements that can be done, and within days, an appeal letter was written to propose a better plan for PhilRice.

He ordered a review of qualification standards and contract rates. Now, new standards apt for a world-class organization are in place. PhilRice doors became open to high-level human resources, especially with the adoption of a revitalized research fellowship and internship program.

HIS IS A TIME OF INFUSION OF FRESH IDEAS AND APPROACHES.

He refocused the thrusts of PhilRice on the rice farmer in addition to the rice crop. It is high time for farmers to get rich by the millions, he proclaimed. Hence, the Rural Transformation Movement was embarked on, with the rallying call of *Gusto Namin Milyonaryo Kayo*.

He pushed for the refocusing of the mandates of branch stations to become technology development and learning centers or, in the NUESTRA (nucleus estate strategy) parlance, nuclei that will ignite the spread of technology and development in the countryside.

In a Darwinian way, selection of best technologies was innovatively devised through his *Palayabangan* 10-5 Challenge. And on a wider scale, our rice production technologies were compared against Asian neighbors to come up with policies and decisions that can boost the Philippine rice industry.

He conceived the Applied Biology Center for the Rice Environment that will serve as incubator of technologies derived from resources in the rice ecosystem and that will, in the end, support the goals of making the rice farmer richer.

IT IS TIME TO EXPAND.

Under his watch, PhilRice expanded in coverage and infrastructural resources. Satellite stations in Samar, Occidental Mindoro, and Zamboanga were born. Buildings, warehouses, staff housing, and dormitories were put up in the central and branch stations of PhilRice.

PhilRice also saw the birth of a new foundation that when nurtured well allows a stronger financial flexibility and autonomy for the institute.

TIME NOT YET UP.

From all angles, except for age, this exponent of time is not yet ready to retire. It would be an utter waste of human resource. He invigorated the culture of science at PhilRice as well as the culture of continuing improvement. In his 3.5 years stint at the institute, he also observed and absorbed what he liked in the culture of PhilRice. In the end, we can only wish the fourth Executive Director of PhilRice well.

He is Eufemio T. Rasco, Jr.

These are nonconventional farmers.
These are people who, with some push and support,
will help transform our rice farming communities,
hopefully, for the **better**.

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