

SPECIAL AREA FOR AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT

BANDILYO

(announcement)



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SPECIAL AREA FOR AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT

BANDILYO

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Formerly published as the quarterly newsletter, *Peryodikit*, the one–page maiden issue came out in March 2017. In January 2018, it morphed into a monthly newsletter. Then again, in May 2018 until December 2019, it became a two–page spread with an occasional feature story about farmer–beneficiaries.

In January 2020, *Bandilyo* (*Waray* for Announcement) has been reformatted into a twelve–page monthly magazine–type publication intended for the reading pleasure of SAAD Program management and decision makers, personnel and staff of DA–RFO 8, stakeholders, partner agencies, and the farmers themselves.

This periodical is a work of nonfiction. All of the people, events, and details described in its pages are real; there are no composite characters, fake names, invented quotes, or imagined conversations. Articles may be reproduced, in full or in part, provided appropriate acknowledgment is given.

From the Regional Focal Person's Desk..



I have always emphasized that SAAD Program’s twin goals are: helping the ‘poorest of the poor’ farmers and attaining food security and sufficiency. Towards this end, we empower them through conduct of capability enhancement activities, provision of livelihood opportunities, and assistance in marketing their products, and to become entrepreneurs. This way, they are able to improve their productivity and increase their income, thereby uplifting them from the morass of poverty.

A LIGHTNING INTERVIEW

with Gov. Damian Mercado

Jocelyn A. Cabañas, Provincial Coordinator, PPMO-Southern Leyte

“We will protect our hogs by closing all the borders, by all means. I don’t care whom I run over. A stricter border control will help prevent African Swine Fever (ASF) from entering the province. We issued a very tight Executive Order to ensure that ASF would not get into the Southern Leyte area.” These are the pronouncements from the Provincial Governor of Southern Leyte, Hon. Damian G. Mercado.

The quick interview happened during the lunch break meeting of the Provincial Inter-Agency Task Force (PIATF)-Southern Leyte held at the Maasin City Gymnasium on February 26, 2021. It was attended by the Provincial Veterinarian Dr. Francisco B. Cabarrubias and Provincial Administrator, Mr. Jason Calva.

Aside from the Local Government Units’ (LGU) Swine Project through the Office of the Provincial Veterinary Services Office (PVSO), the Special Area for Agricultural Development (SAAD) Program had given a total of seven hundred fifty (750) heads hogs to the province, which is comprised of 250 heads for swine production and 500 for swine fattening, from FYs 2018–2020. As of press time, the inventory headcount of hogs is at five hundred eleven (511). Mostly, farmer-beneficiaries are already on their 7th cycle.

Provincial Veterinarian Dr. Cabarrubias cited the provincial border areas that are located in Maasin City, Bontoc, Sogod, and Silago, Southern Leyte. There are strict checkpoints at these identified borders to assure that the province would be ASF-free. He added that there’s a checkpoint also established at Brgy. Himay-angan, Liloan to regulate the movement of vehicles towards Panaon Island, Pacific towns, and Sogod Bay area. This is to guarantee that movement of live hogs and processed meat products will be properly monitored.

Processed products coming from ASF-free areas, like Cebu and Bohol, are allowed to enter the province as long as suppliers could present complete documents. Hogs coming from other municipalities within Southern Leyte are closely monitored as well. Municipal LGUs should first meet the local meat demand of the area before they can sell outside or to neighboring towns. Only municipalities with surplus inventory are allowed to sell hogs, thus, prices of local meat are controlled and regulated.

During the interview, SAAD Program plans for FYs 2021 and 2022 were discussed with the good governor. Full of gratitude, he extended his heartfelt thanks to the Department of Agriculture, in particular, DA-RFO 8, for supporting Southern Leyte with agricultural projects which helped uplift a multitude of farmers from poverty.



Peace, unity and food on the Table during the pandemic

Jose T. Tundag, Area Coordinator II, PPMO-Leyte



Fig. 1. Stakeholders present during the Grand Pulong-pulong pose for a group picture.

Despite border restrictions due to the ongoing pandemic, staff from SAAD PPMO-Leyte under the Department of Agriculture attended a Grand *Pulong-pulong* with other line agencies on September 16, 2020 at the school grounds of Brgy. Sta. Isabel, MacArthur, Leyte. The activity was organized by the 14th Infantry "Avenger" Battalion, headed by Battalion Commander LTC Roberto B. Obaob.

SAAD is a special program initiated and funded by the Department of Agriculture to address the high incidence of poverty, particularly in rural areas that are often inaccessible, and where the poorest of the poor live. Residents of Brgys. Sta. Isabel and Ugisan of MacArthur, Leyte were among the participants of said *Pulong-pulong*.

The residents were given the chance to raise their issues and concerns. Livelihood programs and lack of agricultural inputs (seeds and farm tools) were the main concerns of the farmers' associations that were present in said activity, while sports facilities and internet connectivity for the youth were raised by a group of young farm enthusiasts.

TESDA Leyte Provincial Director Zosimo T. de Asis gave assurances that his office will conduct capacity building trainings that the farmers need. DTI also signified to conduct value -adding skills trainings for farmers, especially the entrepreneurial mind-setting of the group. Representatives from the Department of Agriculture and SAAD Leyte Provincial Coordinator introduced SAAD Program to the associations and explained the process of availment of projects and other interventions. The Philippine Army and Philippine National Police Commanding Officer present ensured the various stakeholders' safety and the transport of inputs that are intended for the farmers.

"The war on insurgency has already been won. We just have to give our farmers livelihood opportunities and provide food on their table, so they will feel the presence of the government, and thereby prevent recruitment and misleading by local insurgents in the area," LTC Obaob said in his Closing Message.

The dawning of a "new normal"

Michael F. Dabuet, Information Officer I, RPMSO

Prior to the occurrence of the dreadful coronavirus disease, which everybody is most afraid of, people have not heard of hitherto unfamiliar phrases/terms, like granular lockdown, blended learning, asymptomatic, whole-of-nation approach, modular learning, modified enhanced community quarantine (MECQ), general community quarantine (GCQ), flattening the curve, pandemic, etc. One of these terms that is often bandied nowadays in written or spoken word, in broadsheets, social media, or in airwaves, is *new normal*. What exactly is *new normal*, and how does it relate to SAAD Program?

It would help the reader if the term is first defined and elaborated in the context of the program.

A **new normal** is a state to which an economy, society, etc. settles following a crisis, when this differs from the situation that prevailed prior to the start of the crisis. The term has been used following the financial crisis of 2007–2008, the aftermath of the 2008–2012 global recession, and the COVID19 pandemic. During COVID19 pandemic, the term *new normal* has an increasing use to refer to human behavioral changes during or after the pandemic. Doctors anticipate that the pandemic will change daily life for most people. This includes limiting person-to-person contact, like handshakes and hugs. Additionally, maintaining distance from others or physical distancing, in general, wearing of mask, and frequent handwashing will likely stick around. – Wikipedia

The curve has not been flattened yet, so to speak, because as trends show, the number of cases continue to spike, as of this writing. In fact, health experts predict that things will turn worse before



they get any better. The economic prospects also continue to be gloomy, especially in urban areas where strict government regulations render people unproductive, helpless, and hungry. Serendipitously, the situation in Eastern Visayas region is not as glum as the scenario found in big metropolises. Although COVID19 cases are gradually increasing hereabouts, they remain largely manageable and controlled.

With SAAD Program, even before the global health pandemic began in January 2020, systems have already been set in place. Plans and programs were drawn beforehand, the Multi-Year Plans until end of project period were primed, such that any changes to the strategies were minute and even negligible. Hence, when the disease became endemic, program implementation was not so much affected. True, there were hindrances, mainly in delivery of commodities and conduct of trainings, not because of project limitations, but rather due to restraints in protocols laid by the government, but when the latter were eased, interventions were continued and facilitated to reach the project beneficiaries.

The most noteworthy change observed in the farmers was in their mindset, attitude, and behavior. Whereas, constant supervision was what they needed at the outset, they became



responsible in managing their affairs. Because field personnel could not bodily visit them due to regulated travels, the farmers continued to meet, work cooperatively and ingeniously, and even help other associations sustain their activities. Mayhap, this could be attributed to a certain extent to the Values Re-orientation Seminar that all association officers had undergone as part and parcel of their being project recipients.

Some associations sold their vegetable produce at a bargain, and a farmer, Vince Alvin Portugal of Brgy. Bulod, Sta. Fe, Leyte shared more than two hundred (200) pieces of his newly-harvested bottle gourd (*upo*) to personnel of the DA-Regional Field Office 8 *pro bono* as his way of thanking the agriculture department for its support to smallholder farmers like him.

Another change manifested in the farmers was the entrepreneurial spirit that was inculcated in them, which has apparently borne fruit. Farmers of the traditional mold tend to leave merchandising and selling of their produce to middlemen and other buyers, rather than doing the vending themselves. They are already content with traditional ways of doing things in their own milieu. But with SAAD farmers, they learned that eliminating mid-level businessmen would increase their prospects of earning more profits. Thus, they took it upon themselves to market their products themselves. It helped that PPMSO personnel and the respective LGUs went all-out in their support for these enterprising farmers by locating wholesalers and making referrals in the value chain.

The public health threat may still last a little bit longer than expected, but attitudinal and behavioral changes in the farmers will continue to surface. The positive values of honesty, industry, and perseverance, plus entrepreneurial skills that were inculcated in them by the program, have gone deep in their psyche, influencing their systems and methods towards a change for the better, thus helping them improve their coping mechanisms vis-à-vis the challenges they face in the *new normal*.

Long Anticipated P/MAOs' MEETING HELD

Michael F. Dabuet, Information Officer I, RPSMO

Provincial/ Municipal Agricultural Officers from Leyte and Samar provinces converged on May 7, 2021 at the DJP Hall, Leyte Park Hotel, Tacloban City. Health protocols were strictly observed during the activity. The face-off meeting also involved agricultural bigwigs from Southern Leyte, Eastern Samar, and Northern Samar, albeit through Zoom.

The participants were refreshed on the FY 2021 SAAD Program guidelines and directions for program-covered provinces and municipalities. Also taken up were the regional physical and financial accomplishments from 2017-2021. In the afternoon, discussed were the production data of all commodity interventions for the period 2017-2020.

At the open forum, many clarificatory questions were raised, especially by newly-appointed MAOs, which were ably answered by the SAAD Regional Action Officer, Ms. Ferlynn V. Basañez. Both RED Angel C. Enriquez and ARD for Operations and Extension Larry U. Sultan graced the occasion, giving added moral support to program implementors and their LGU counterparts.



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CELEBRATING WOMEN FARMERS *in a pandemic-challenged world*

Michael F. Dabuet, Information Officer I, RPMSO



We have all gone through different seasons in life. In the book of Ecclesiastes, every milestone in our life is marked by a season. A season of bliss, exuberance, and gain at one point; and on the opposite, pain, anxiety, and hardship. A menagerie of emotions that shape our ideals, and who we are at present. In this season of waiting, God has allowed us to reflect on the unique path we have taken from our humble beginnings to where we are today. The journey we saw was a bevy of not-so-good choices and circumstance, but the original light has never flickered nor diminished.

SAAD Program is now on its fifth year of existence and still running. One of the program's indelible legacies is women's autonomy. In the male-dominated farming milieu, more and more of the fairer sex are actively engaging themselves in project operations and management, and leadership roles, breaking away from the tradition of women being relegated to the background, to inferior chores, such as housekeeping and child-rearing.

Many farmers' associations are currently led by women, not only in Rural Improvement Clubs (RICs) that are conventionally populated by women, but in groups that have already shed their gender bias. This could be due in part to gender sensitivity sessions that are integrated into the capacity enhancement trainings, which are conducted as part of social preparation and mind-setting activities prior to actual project implementation.

Especially at a time when all customs and practices have gone askew, be they in education, business, government service, and other facets of our existence, largely brought by the pandemic, the presence of women leaders and functionaries has allowed

for rational balance in decision-making, diligence in pursuing goals, family-oriented supervision, etc.

To quote Archimedes: Give me a lever and a place to stand on, and I will move the earth. In rural developmental work, SAAD Program in the past five years has provided that lever for women in this part of the country. It focused on forging that lever to build a platform, where farmers and fisherfolk were given a wide latitude to develop their innate capabilities to become independent-minded, empowered individuals.

Apparently, that vision has borne fruit as evidenced by countless documented testimonies of farmers, not only women, saying that their lives have been helped substantially by the program. As to what degree their status have leveled up is still the subject of an impact assessment that is a work-in-progress. But for whatever it is, the farmers' affirmations are indications that SAAD Program has captured the hearts and minds of those whom it has touched. It accorded a glimmer of hope and anticipation for a better future for all project beneficiaries.

Ecclesiastes 3: 1-8 (King James Version)

- ¹ *To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven:*
- ² *A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted;*
- ³ *A time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up;*
- ⁴ *A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance;*
- ⁵ *A time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;*
- ⁶ *A time to get, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away;*
- ⁷ *A time to rend, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;*
- ⁸ *A time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace.*

Cresente Moralde, the Mari-culture Enthusiast

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The sea with its vast and rich resources has been the main source of livelihood of Cresente Moralde, a resident of Brgy. Canlupao, Tomas Oppus, Southern Leyte. However, abundant as the oceans are, its bounties had still been elusive to the cast nets of Manong Bebot, as he is commonly called by his family and the local neighborhood.

A fisherman since his teenage years, Manong Bebot conditioned his life to the tides and the crashing or calming demeanor of the waves. He learned to respect the unpredictability of the seas, at times generous with its riches and on some days, he was met with empty nets and the tired faces of fisherfolk coming home from a lazy day



The fish cages of Manong Bebot

at sea.

Nonetheless, being a loving husband and dedicated father to his seven children, Manong Bebot focused on fishing to provide for his family. He soon turned to aquaculture as livelihood and started a Bangus Fish Cage Culture a few years ago with his association co-members.

Being the chairman of the Municipal Fisheries and Aquatic Resources Management Council (MFARMC) of the municipality of Tomas Oppus, he has been actively involved in the programs for the protection and preservation of marine resources. Through his active efforts, he was selected as a beneficiary of the Special Area for Agricultural Development (SAAD) Program, which aims to reduce poverty and attain food security, at the most opportune time of his aquaculture practice.

The program delivered a total of 6,500 milkfish fingerlings, complete with 56 sacks feeds in October 2019. These fingerlings were stocked in his fish cage and the inputs boosted his production. It gradually increased his income, thus providing his family enough food and money for their daily needs.

"Dako kaajo ang natabang 'tong fingerlings ug feeds sa among panginabuhì kay sa una, sa wa pa, naglisod mi kaajo sa among adlaw-adlaw nga gastuson ug panginahanglan. Dako na kaajo ang diperensya karon." (The fingerlings and feeds had been a great help to our livelihood. Back then, I had a hard time meeting the daily needs of my family, but now, our lives have somewhat improved compared to our situation before.) The fisherman narrated as he recounted the hardships he encountered while making both ends meet for his family before SAAD Program rendered assistance.

In early 2020, the issue of the first COVID19 local infection was

broadcast nationwide, and one after another, local government units started closing borders, including municipalities in Southern Leyte. But this did not deter Manong Bebot. Instead, he transformed the threat into an opportunity to help his local community by providing fresh and affordable fish. He not only provided for his family's needs, but also helped ensure the food security of the municipality.

"Mo-engage ta sa mari-culture kay dili lang ang atong pamilya ang makabeneplisyo; ang uban pang lungsod, matabangan sa atong produkto, ug dili ta maigo sa krisis sa atong panahon karon." (Let us engage in mari-culture because not only may our families benefit from it, but our products can also help other towns, and we will not be severely affected by the present crisis.) He further stated while encouraging fisherfolk, such as himself, to engage in aquaculture ventures.

Four months of milkfish culture meant backbreaking hard work, scorched skin, and fear of failure of the project. But his dedication paid off as he was able to harvest a total of 1,268 kg, bangus, which he sold in his local community for an affordable price of PhP150.00-160.00/kilo.

From this he was able to earn a staggering amount of almost PhP200,000.00. His hard labor being compensated, and having a stable income now that could potentially have greater gains in the future, he rooted himself to the ground and remembered the lessons he learned from past mistakes and personal difficulties.

Aquaculture is an industry with great potential that can inspire positive change in one's self, the community, and the nation. Manong Bebot plans to expand his aquaculture venture by investing more of his income from his previous harvest into the rehabilitation of two units fish cage, with the help of a zero-percent interest loan from a local cooperative bank, payable in 10 years. He also saved a portion of his earnings for the procurement of fingerlings and feeds to sustain his next cropping.

As SAAD Program effectively helped him establish a stable livelihood, he hopes that it would still be continued and wished that more fishermen could benefit from the program through the provision of fingerlings and feeds. Mr. Moralde expressed, *"Hinaot unta nga dili sila (SAAD) mag-undang sa pagsuporta kanamo, kay kami pud, andam maghatag ug suporta sa ila."* (I hope SAAD Program continues to support fisherfolk like me, because we are also ready to support the endeavors and mission of the program.)



Cresente Moralde, SAAD Program beneficiary of Tomas Oppus, Southern Leyte

OYSTER FARMING: Saving Money Earning Values

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Mr. Danilo Gunsad showing off an installed oyster culture line sponsored by SAAD Program in Leyte, Leyte.

“Ang matag-pamilya may-ada gud pagtinabangay pinaagui sa mag-asawa. Kay wa’y income kung ang usa kapamilya di maghago, pero kun maghago ang matag-usa o ang matag-pamilya, wa gud kapobre nga muabot, kun matag-usa mulihok.” (The husband and wife in the family should help one

“A penny saved is a penny earned.” Many must have heard about this saying, but only few practice it. Undeniably, saving is itself an education and fosters self-discipline and patience. These virtues serve as stronghold of hope for oyster farmers in Barangay Calaguise, Leyte, Leyte, as they wait for a bountiful harvest come November–December 2020.

“Importante nga may-ada kami pangabuton ha dagat nga amon ma-iincome-an oras han pagdagko. Pinaka-alkansya namon ine ha dagat.” Mr. Danilo Gunsad, member of Sitio Mulho Talaba Growers Association shared. (It is important to have something that we can earn from once it [oyster] grows. It serves as our piggy bank in the sea.)

Mr. Gunsad and 14 other SAAD beneficiaries of Sitio Mulho Talaba Growers Association fondly call oyster farming as underwater “*alkansyahan*” (money bank), since they have to patiently wait for 6 months or more until the oysters reach their marketable size. It serves not as mere source of income, but an instrument in enriching themselves with the core values of a real fisherman – optimism, patience, and sustainability.

He and other members received PhP496,000.00 worth of input materials for oyster production. Through these materials, 15 cultivation lines were made and a projection of more than 1 ton, or PhP300,000.00 worth of oysters will be harvested in the months of November and December. Said oyster culture modules were installed in January 2020 through the 2019 SAAD funds.

True enough, the solidarity of relationships between husbands and wives of the Special Area for Agricultural Development (SAAD) beneficiaries in Leyte, Leyte were strengthened through their willingness to work with one another.

another. Poverty would not exist if each of the members will work hard, but doing the opposite will result in low/no income., said Mrs. Visitacion M. Marientes, President of the association.

Mrs. Marientes, along with the wives of the member-beneficiaries, are empowered by performing equally important tasks on the oyster production. They help their husbands create the culture lines and take an active part in the local promotion and marketing of their produce. At times, they even accompany their husbands on installing and monitoring the oyster modules.

Old you may say, but work we say, Hey!

The program is a great help to their senior citizen members who can no longer go fishing offshore. Mr. Jose Salino, a 63 year-old *talaba* grower gratefully shared, *“Sanglit, nagpapa-salamat ako nga bisan na manla ginagmay nga mga bulig, dako man gihapon ine nga para ha amon, labi na yana kay ako in lagas na, diri na nalahunay gud ha pagkadto ha dagat. Ine nala nga butang an akon guin-aatiman hine nga pagpatubo hin talaba.”* (Therefore, I am thankful that even in such small ways, we consider them a big help already, especially now that I am old and can no longer manage to go fishing. Tending to this oyster culture is the only thing that I do.)

In addition, the input materials given can last up to two–three years with proper care and maintenance. Compared to the makeshift spat collectors, oysters can be easily pulled out from the HDPE spat collectors installed, providing a more convenient way of harvesting oysters for senior fisherfolk.

Though the oysters have yet to be harvested, Mr. Salino and some members of the association seldom get oysters from the culture lines. This is to help minimize frequent visits to public markets and

lessen the possibility of exposing themselves to the unseen threat of the pandemic.

Also, in spite of the input materials being sustainable and adaptive to their community, challenges on monitoring and transporting their produce are oftentimes encountered since Barangay Calaguise is situated in the interior part of the municipality. Both Mr. Gunsad and Mr. Salino shared their hope of building a guardhouse and acquiring a motorboat for constant monitoring of their installed culture lines for the immediate conveyance of their goods to prospective buyers in nearby municipalities and islands.

Mrs. Marientes and other members of the association also envision to purchase additional materials for their culture lines from their expected profit after the harvest. *"Ang halin sa among pagtalabahan, igdugang namo pagpalit ug materyales, arun continuous ang among trabaho."* (Using earnings from our oyster production, we will buy additional input materials so our operation will be continuous.), she intimated.

Further, the association is willing to take a leap on processing their products to reach larger markets, and have stable and direct consolidation not only of their products, but of other associations in Leyte, Leyte that ventured into oyster production.

"Diri lang nga sige nalang hatag ang gobyerno, kailangan mutabang pud mi sa gobyerno. Give -and-take, ba," (It should not solely be the government's effort, we (fisherfolk) should also help the government. It's a give-and-take proposition.), Mrs. Marientes added.

Armed with self-discipline, patience, solidarity, and courage, the people of Calaguise through their oyster production will continue to fulfill the real *saad* (promise) towards a prosperous and sustainable future of the fisheries industry. With the will to be one with the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) in attaining a *"Malinis at Masaganang Karagatan"* (Clean and Prosperous Seas), they will continue to cooperate as we heal and work as one.



Marasa! *"Ha pagsura an amon talaba marasa pagkilaw, matambok, bantok pagtayam, pag-usap. Damo an naayon, damo an na-order. (Our kinilaw oysters are delicious, rich, and juicy to savor. [That's why] a lot of people like it, and we receive many orders.)"*, delightedly shared Mr. Danilo Gunsad.



Underwater Money Bank. Fifteen (15) oyster culture lines, which are fondly called "alkansyahan" by Sitio Mulho Talaba Growers Association members, were installed in Barangay Calaguise, Leyte, Leyte through the 2019 SAAD Program.



"We also work alongside our husbands," Mrs. Visitacion Marientes, Association President, shares the spirit of women empowerment enabled by SAAD Program.



Never too old to work. Mr. Jose Salino still continues to work at the oyster culture at age 63.



We work as one. Members of Sitio Mulho Talaba Growers Association work hand-in-hand towards a prosperous harvest of oyster in year 2020.

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