

# Farmer innovators inspire their peers

Darlyn Angeles

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Prolinnova Philippines, led by the International Institute of Rural Reconstruction (IIRR) celebrated the 2016 International Farmer Innovation Day by bringing farmers from Guinayangan to farmer innovators across Region 4. Through a roving workshop, farmers were able to visit and learn from their peers.

## *Farmer inventor*

Mr. Cesar Mamaril is a rice farmer from Bae, Laguna. He has been practicing organic rice farming through focusing on soil health. Mr. Mamaril is also a farmer researcher actively partnering with local scientists. He invented a farmer-friendly tool to measure soil nutrients. The minus-one-element technique is a simple experiment to determine what nutrient is deficient or insufficient that limits the growth of a crop.



“Identify first what is limiting in the soil and be assured of an increase yield,” he pointed out in one of his sharing. He further pointed out the value of diversification in rice farms. Through the Sorjan method, farmers allocate an area for growing vegetables, fruit bearing trees and fishpond. Originally from Indonesia, the practice maximizes productivity of the farms that ensures regular income and food security. Mr. Mamaril also shared his decision to focus on more marketable varieties of rice like the glutinous, pigmented and aromatic varieties as it commands a higher price in the market.

### *Diligence pays*

Meanwhile, farmers from Guinayangan were inspired by one hard working farmer from Silang, Cavite. Mr. Julian Aguilar revealed how he increased his family's income by maximizing his 3 hectare land. He is practicing multiple cropping by planting cacao, coffee, dragon fruit, pineapple, calamansi, pomelo, coconut, and many others. In fact he earns Php 6,000 (\$ 122) a week just selling the leaves of chili pepper. But the most important message he gave to the farmers was to make use of the knowledge they learned from trainings, seminars and from this roving workshop if they want their lives to improve. Learning is useless unless they practice it.

### *Rising from adversity*



In Nagcarlan, Laguna, two members of the Laguna Cacao Farmers Association or LACAFA revealed how they built their livelihood after a major typhoon hit their farm. In 2014, typhoon Glenda (international name Rammasun) hit region 4 and completely destroyed most of the fruit farms of Nagcalan farmers. This did not stop Mr. Fred Dereza and Rodel Dorado to rise from this misfortune; instead they started to look for alternative crops they can grow with more returns. Both started to

attend seminars in cacao production. They organized other farmers and sought the support of the local government. Now they went beyond production but engaged in value addition through production of tablea chocolate. He brought the farmers from Guinayangan to the production area and showed the whole process including the proper technique for fermenting tablea. Mr. Dorado further illustrated the proper way to collect seeds for seedling propagation.

### *Starting from small*

Another inspiring innovator farmer is Mr. Renato Belen or endearingly called Mang Ato. Ato Belen Farm is a known source of quality fruit tree seedlings where all IIRR fruit trees distributed to farmer cooperators are also purchased. From a mere 200 square meter and a capital of Php 700 (\$14), Mang Ato was able to grow his farm to 2.3 hectares with sheer hard work and exceptional diligence. Guinayangan farmers learned that there is business in seedling raising. They also had a quick lesson in grafting.

The value of the roving workshop is not only to broaden the knowledge of farmers to other available approaches and farming systems but more importantly to offer inspiration, motivation and encouragement that farming is a viable livelihood. Providing opportunity for new perspectives, roving workshops allows farmers to go beyond what they have been accustomed to. New knowledge brings new opportunities and drive to test new things.