

Binhi ni Abraham's Lakbay-Aral in Batangas

In an effort to improve their sugarcane farming enterprise, the Binhi ni Abraham block farm staged a "Lakbay-Aral" or field visit in the province of Batangas on September 23-25, 2013. The group, comprised of 13 participants was accompanied by Tarlac Mill District Officer Mr. Joel Ronario. The activity pushed through in spite of the torrential rains and thunderstorms brought about by the east-Asian monsoon.

On the first day, the group visited the office of the Batangas Integrated Sugar Planters Multi-Purpose Cooperative (BISPMPC) where they were introduced to the cooperative Board of Directors and office staff. The BISPMPC generously shared important information with the group, especially the significance of quedan bidding and its financing schemes as well. Come noontime they travelled to Brgy. Concepcion in Alitagtag, Batangas, and met with SRA Board Member Pablito "Ka Lito" Sandoval. Said visit had two parts namely, the lecture/discussion, and the actual field visit to his farms.

The first part consisted of the renowned cane planter's lecture on sugarcane agronomy as he shared his vast sugarcane farming experience. The participants were highly attentive during the course of the discussion. This attentiveness was even replaced with awe and excitement as they were shown the cane stalks from Ka Lito's farm that they themselves weighed at more than 3 kilograms each. At the end of his presentation, Ka Lito encouraged the group to continue with sugarcane farming and at the same time strive harder to improve production. During the actual field visit, the group observed the uniformly good cane stand of Ka Lito's crops. They were also shown the sugarcane stand in the areas where emphasis is given to weed-free cane management. Lastly, the host farmer-civil servant showcased the tractors that he is using in his farm, as well as the other equipment such as ripper, mechanical planter, harrow, and mouldboard plow.



The participants, together with SRA Board Member Pablito Sandoval (first row, fourth from right), during their visit at the latter's farm in Brgy. Concepcion, Alitagtag, Batangas.

Ibaan, Batangas was the destination of the group for the second day and their first stop was at the farm of Mrs. Maila Vilela-Toreja in Brgy. Pangao. The generous lady-farmer toured the guest around her 2.5-hectare farm where they observed diversified farming systems and organic crop/livestock production as well. Interestingly, Maila grows hot pepper, black pepper, fancy rice, ornamentals, and spices in her farm. She also raises native pigs and chicken, honeybee, and rabbit. After Maila's, the group proceeded to the dairy farm of her better half, Mr. Balu Toreja. Unfortunately the heavy downpour prevented the group from going around the farm so the amiable host just had a discussion with them about dairy farm-related matters. His farm has 25 heads of Holstein Jersey cattle and 11 heads of water buffalo, with a daily milk production of 18 and 8 litres, respectively.



Farmer-owner Ms. Maila Vilala-Toreja (first row, third from right) obliges for a souvenir shot with the participants.

On the third and final day of the Lakbay-Aral, the group visited the Lucban MPC Block Farm in Brgy. Lucban, Balayan, Batangas. It is one of the four pioneer block farms that were established in the country over a year ago. Being so, it can be said that they have greater experience with the government's sugarcane convergence program and are in a good position to share their learning and experiences with other blossoming block farms. The participants had a thorough discussion on important matters with the Board of Directors and members of the Lucban MPC Block Farm. Mr. Isabelo Arroyo, former cooperative chairman, shared their experiences with the block farm program starting from the planning stages up to the post harvesting phase. He also explained to the visitors how they market their quedans under the cooperative name, and in the process deducting from it their loan payments to Land Bank of the Philippines. "Be honest and humble as you serve the cooperative. You need to sacrifice for the endeavours of your organization to succeed," Mr. Arroyo states.

The visit to Lucban MPC may have concluded the 3-day Lakbay-Aral of the Binhi ni Abraham Block Farm in the province of Batangas but the participants are thankful for the lessons, experiences, and inspiration they gained. They all went home happy and optimistic about the future of their block farm.



The participants happily pose with the Board of Directors and members of the Lucban Multi-Purpose Cooperative during their field visit.