

## SUCCESSFUL OPSI SEMINAR IN BUKIDNON



*Participants obviously enjoyed the three-day training as they posed for this rare group shot together with the Extension Division's ton brass headed by Chief Agriculturist Dr. Dina Padilla-Fernandez.*

The Extension team of Dr. Dina Padilla-Fernandez, Evelyn Estanislao, Adel Catuira, Zyrus Oliver Montiel, Alicia Sabordo and Joseph Peter Gonzales trooped to Bukidnon on November 11-15, 2013 to give OPSI training for JA Agro block farm enrollees. The successful undertaking was held at the Villa Estrella Fine Inn in Maramag.

In her inspirational talk, DAR Development Facilitator Ms. Ellen Cid congratulated the participants because of their love for their land, for fighting for its acquisition. And now that they can call it their own, it is imperative that they take good care of the land they till. Ms. Cid advised the body to pay due taxes and cooperate with the government.

Dr. Dina Padilla-Fernandez pointed out various issues during her lecture: she said that it's a fact that big farms are considered more productive. That's why being blocked to become bigger in size is a positive move to achieve scale efficiency. And since this is a convergence program of DAR, DA and SRA, all block farms will receive priority farm services. Benefits of this will only be realized if farm operations will be synchronized, comparable to operating a big corporate farm. It is imperative to have Farm Managers to oversee the operations. To be able to increase productivity, it is important to adapt to new technologies. Dr. Fernandez reminded everyone to have target-setting and try to achieve production efficiency.



In her discussion of the present situation of the local sugar industry, Dr. Fernandez stressed the importance of obtaining real data. She also introduced the participants to the probable scenario in 2015 when the sugar tariff will be down to 5% and the entry of imported sugar will push downwards the mill site price of locally-produced sugar. This saddened the participants so Dr. Fernandez explained that SRA

is doing its best to combat the effects if ever. She encouraged the body to use idle lands wisely by planting sugarcane to maximize its potential. The most important thing is to decrease production cost without reducing productivity.



In his report, Bukidnon MDO Wilfredo Mapano revealed that of the 67,500 hectares, majority are small with low productivity. He also highlighted some of their important programs like tractor services, soils laboratory being available for soil analysis to determine its nutrient requirements, nursery for cane points multiplication and Trichogramma as biological control for stem borers. He also shared that for this crop year, there was an occurrence of white grub in their area, which was later addressed in the discussion of the lined-up topics during the seminar proper.

The participants reacted so well with the group activity which Dr. Fernandez introduced called “Zombie Tag.” The game, characterized of contaminating everyone to become a zombie actually highlights the value of synchronization and going into one direction if everyone wants to obtain unified success. This is a sharp and vivid depiction of how block farming successfully operates. The attendees obviously enjoyed the activity.

Mr. Zyus Oliver Montiel took charge in lecturing about the sugarcane plant’s soil requirements. From there, Ms. Evelyn Estanislao took the floor and her topic on the sugarcane plant’s nutritional requirements was a relevant follow-up. Meanwhile, Mr. Ismael Braga handled the topic on soil sampling and fertilizer computation.

In the discussion of his assigned topics, Mr. Adel Catuira uncovered some pertinent concerns which the OPSI training was able to address: the agricultural practices of the participants are still very traditional and when it comes to milling, they simply don’t know their efficiency in sugar recovery. At least, with their new insights gained out of the OPSI seminar, they can gradually improve and hopefully be at par with the rest. He also administered a Knowledge Leveling exercise as well as Key Checks and Recommendations (he made practical suggestions in improving productivity starting with proper land preparation, seed selection, proper and timely fertilizer application, timely weed control management, proper harvesting and ratoon management.)

Interestingly, the Extension team divided into two groups and talked to potential block farms in the district. Dr. Fernandez’s team met with the BISMARTZ Small Farmers Cooperative and the members expressed strong interest in the idea. There were no huge concerns except for the use of the tractor. Meanwhile, the other group headed by Mr. Montiel met with the Kauyonan Multi-Purpose Cooperative. Some of their findings: a number of members have bad credit standing with the Land Bank; most ARBs have shifted to corn from sugarcane and it’s actually the non-ARB coop members who are more interested to join the block farm program which poses technical difficulty ; and some ARBs have large farm size (10 or 15 hectares per ARB).



On the last day, the attendees were grateful to the Extension team as they received their Certificates of Participation. Mr. Joseph Peter Gonzales served as host-moderator for the three-day affair.