

## *Pensumil Farmer Leaders Undergo OPSI Training*

The SRA Extension team (L & M) conducted a successful OPSI seminar for farmer leaders in the PENSUMIL mill district at the Luzon Agricultural Research and Extension Center (LAREC) in Pampanga on November 19-21, 2014.



LAREC's Ms. Alicia Burcer, Senior Science Research Specialist delivered the Welcome Remarks. She cited the importance of the three-day training, saying that it would greatly help the Bicolano planters in obtaining higher productivity. Since it was the participants' first time in LAREC, Ms. Burcer acquainted them with the place through her AVP presentation which featured the center's main areas and its respective function. She wished the attendees a fruitful stay in LAREC and hoped for the event's success.

Newly-appointed Pensumil MDDC Chair Mr. Raul Carreras delivered the inspirational talk. He said that the OPSI training was a vital undertaking for their group, in order to gain more knowledge on technology. He encouraged the body to focus on the seminar, apply/adopt the technology they'd learn and eventually share it with other members of their association. Engineer Carreras advised the participants as well to practice "vertical expansion" to combat the problem on AFTA when 2015 ushers in. This means taking good care and cultivating the existing farm in order to gain higher yield, 40%-100% for it to be profitable. Mr. Carreras, himself a Gawad Saka Award recipient as Outstanding Sugarcane Farmer in 2004 also revealed to the group's delight the propagation of the variety Phil. 99-1793 and come June next year, these will be released to Pensumil planters.



After Mr. Carreras' insightful message, Pensumil's Chief Chemist Ms. Salud Bustamante took the floor to give some vital mill updates. Following said topic was "Sugar Situationer in the Philippines" as presented by Chief Agriculturist (L & M) Dr. Dina Padilla-Fernandez, "How Sugar is Being Made and Shared in the District" as tackled by Mr. Joel Ronario (Mill District Officer, Tarlac) and "SRA's System of Regulating Sugar" as explained by Mr. Rahman Dunton (Regulation Officer assigned in Pensumil).

The following day started with a farm tour in LAREC in which the attendees enjoyed and learned a lot about several sugarcane varieties in the center. They were guided by several LAREC personnel. After this, a meaty and lengthy lecture from SRA Board Member Pablito Sandoval about “How to Increase Sugarcane Production and Productivity: A Farmer’s Practice” followed. Said topic was warmly received by the attendees since Ka Lito’s rise as a model farmer is inspiring. He revealed his success formula starting with: Deep Tillage through Land Preparation, Early Crop Establishment, Use of HYV, Proper Fertilization, Pests and Disease Control, Timely Harvesting, Ratoon Management and Hard Work/Persistence. As his parting shot, the respectable Board Member challenged the audience, “There’s no such thing as barren soil, only barren minds. Go beyond the soil’s physical limitation. Farmers should be able to overcome the odds!”



From there, the Extension team went into full flow in the presentation of their respective lecture. Mr. Joel Ronario started the ball rolling with his topic on “Understanding the Sugarcane Plant” followed by Ms. Evelyn Estanislao, Senior Science Research Specialist who discussed “Soil & Nutrient Requirements of Sugarcane” and Ms. Agnes Casupanan, Science Research Specialist from LAREC who tackled “Pests and Diseases of Sugarcane.” The participants truly enjoyed each session as they admitted it was like going back to school and learning the basics of sugarcane growing.

In the third and final day of the OPSI training, the participants had the chance of visiting a progressive farm in Murcia, Concepcion, Tarlac courtesy of Mr. Joel Ronario. This was the Vulcan Sugar Farming Corporation with Mr. Edgar Sumat as Operations Manager and Mr. Romy Corpuz as Farm Manager. They were able to witness various farm activities and practices observed during the visit like planting using a mechanical planter and harvesting using a mechanical cane harvester. They also marveled on the varieties planted there. The Pensumil farmer leaders were really thankful for the experience during their three-day seminar. According to them, it was a perfect combination of learning and fun and that they would surely apply all the learnings they gained when they go back to Bicol.

--- By Joseph Peter R. Gonzales