

SRA Holds OPSI for Its Personnel



Through the directive of Adm. Anna Rosario V. Paner, an internal two-day OPSI (Outreach Program of the Sugarcane Industry) training was given to select SRA personnel on March 9-10, 2017 at the Luzon Agricultural Research and Extension Center (LAREC) in Floridablanca, Pampanga.

A banner program of the agency, Adm. Paner deemed it best for employees to have basic knowledge of the OPSI which is handled by the Extension Services Division since its inception. All departments sent their respective representatives who were all informed and enlightened on what transpires during an OPSI. While for the new ones the training provided fresh learning, the more veteran attendees who have experienced a similar activity in the past considered it as a refresher course.

Officially welcoming the participants on Day One was Mr. Laverne Olalia who presently acts as OIC of LAREC. He highlighted the physical features of the center as well as the important research-related activities happening there for the information of everybody. He wished the attendees a pleasant stay and hoped that they'll enjoy the two-day training.



Dr. M. Dina Padilla-Fernandez (OIC, Office of the Manager III, RDE-L & M) delivered the Opening Remarks in which she warmly welcomed the group and expressed hope that everyone will learn a lot from the worthwhile undertaking. She pointed out the essence of holding such training: for SRA employees to realize not just the plus sides of the

OPSI program but the fact that every department has a contribution in its smooth conduct in the mill districts. According to Dr. Fernandez, it's about time that the SRA community has a better understanding of how OPSI is being given to the clientele and the positive effects it brings, technology absorption and yield improvement-wise.



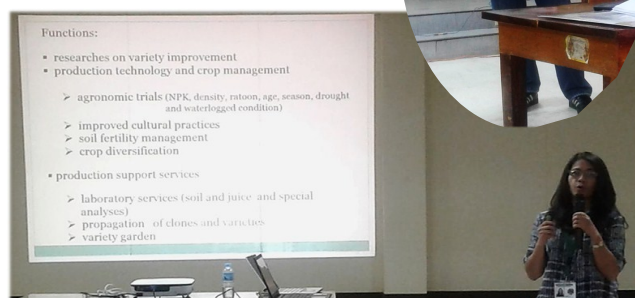
The first topic to be discussed was "Understanding the Sugarcane Crop" with Mr. Adel Catuira (OIC, Extension Services Division, L & M) as lecturer. Participants enjoyed this session specially when Mr. Catuira used a live sugarcane specimen during his talk to support his visual presentation. He gave emphasis on the stages of growth of the sugarcane plant so that the audience would realize the essence of timing and availability of resources in sugarcane farming.

Newly-appointed Pampanga Mill District Officer Mr. Zyus Oliver Montiel immediately followed suit with his topic on “Soil Physical Properties” where the attendees learned about the basic composition of soil and its type and structures: that sandy loam soil is the most suitable for sugarcane planting. As a follow-up topic, Ms. Evelyn Estanislao (Senior Science Research Specialist) discussed about “Soil Fertility and Plant Nutrition” which enlightened the body on the major nutrients for plant growth like nitrogen, potassium and phosphorus.

In the afternoon, one of LAREC’s Senior Science Research Specialists in the person of Mr. Benjamin Manlapaz talked about important key points on “Sugarcane Production” which proved to be very informative for the participants. Ditto for the topic on “Nursery Management” given by Tarlac Mill District Officer Mr. Joel Ronario. Participants learned many insights on how a sugarcane nursery farm operates and how to take care of it



Ms. Vina Serrano, Senior Science Research Specialist from LAREC was the next speaker and she shed light on Production Technology and Crop Management (PTCM) which is one of the center’s foremost projects. The last topic for the day was on the Yield Estimation System for Sugarcane (YESS) Project which was discussed by Mr. Olalia who is the head of SRA’s Crop Estimate team. He stressed that YESS is a collaborative project of the agency with the UP Diliman College of Engineering whose aim is to further improve the yield of each mill district through modern technological breakthroughs.



For Day Two, participants were made to experience actual field activities with the help of some LAREC staff such as: soil sampling, GPS surveying and actual planting. Everyone was excited and happy with the hands-on activities lined-up for them as they’ve learned so many lessons on field work and realized that sugarcane growing entails dedication and hard work.



Before the resumption of the lecture on the last three remaining topics, SRA Adm. Anna Rosario Paner along with Board Members Mr. Hermenegildo Serafica and Mr. Roland Beltran arrived in LAREC to personally check and give inspiring thoughts to the participants.



The former congratulated the batch for their participation in the worthwhile undertaking



and expressed hope that whatever they learned would make them love and appreciate the sugar industry even more. Adm. Paner stressed that it’s imperative for every SRA employee to be well-verse in OPSI since it’s one of SRA’s banner projects. Mr. Serafica and Mr. Beltran more or less echoed the same thought and wished everyone a fruitful and fun day.

As the VIP guests and their entourage left for their scheduled Board Meeting in Tarlac that day, Ms. Agnes Casupanan (Science Research Specialist) took the floor to discuss about “Pest and Disease Management of Sugarcane” which the audience enjoyed due to her light and comedic approach. The group was introduced to many types of pests and diseases which attack the sugarcane plant and how to combat these.

For the culminating topic, Dr. Fernandez talked about the present state of the Philippine sugarcane industry in which she presented pertinent facts like the trends of sugar production, consumption (supply and demand) and the domestic and world market prices. The performance of the sugarcane farms in terms of productivity by sizes of farms was also discussed as well as the low productivity of the smallest ones.

Dr. Fernandez further stated that it was against this premise that the SRA is into Block Farming. The audience got enlightened on the current scenario for the RDE and the road it would trek in the coming days. Especially when the unified support of all the employees is considered, continued success can be achieved.

After lunch, the group proceeded to the Central Azucarera de Tarlac (CAT) for a mill tour. While waiting for the tour to begin, Ms. Estanislao, as the Coordinator of the Block Farm Project for Luzon and Mindanao took the opportunity to lecture on SRA’s Block Farm Project which drew positive response from the participants. She explained all the mechanics and rules in the formation of BF’s and what benefits small planters can derive in joining. According to her, when formed to a big group, these farmers are given the voice and access to lots of privileges (like trainings, equipment, tractors, etc.) that would contribute to a high yield. She also mentioned about the scholarship SRA is giving to Agricultural students who are poor but deserving.

As they were doing the tour inside CAT, the participants witnessed how a mill operates and how sugar is made. Informative and fun at the same time, the participants went home happy and satisfied with what they’ve learned in the two-day training.

By: Joseph Peter R. Gonzales