

PCAF

QUARTERLY

Tradition meets innovation: How AFCs in Cordillera cultivate culture and agriculture



Mountain Province PAFC Chairperson Calde shows stalks of his heirloom rice to the team of Lakbay Panayam.

The Cordillera Administrative Region (CAR) is known for its abundant natural resources. Its vast mountains hold rich mineral deposits while its terraces are famous for housing a variety of rice and highland fruits and vegetables.

Tagged as the vegetable basket of the country, many forget that CAR is also home to several indigenous tribes with unique ethnicities. These communities and their traditions make the region a vibrant representation of Filipino culture.

In the Lakbay Panayam of the Philippine Council for Agriculture and Fisheries on October 10 to 14, 2022, the CAR Agricultural and Fishery Councils (AFCs) share how these distinct practices also manifest in their agriculture and fisheries sector.

Bringing back organic farming with a twist

“Ang gusto talaga namin ay back-to-basics sa agriculture, organic farming lalo na ngayong mataas na ang abono,” said Bontoc Municipal AFC (MAFC) Chairperson Coulen Lic-paen.

Like all of the AFCs in Cordillera, Lic-paen strongly advocates organic agriculture for the sustainable development of the sector as well as ensuring food security in their households and communities.

“Dito sa Bontoc, halos lahat ng pamilya ay may tanim. Kaya nilang maging self-sufficient sa pagkain. Kaya hinihikayat talaga namin silang magcompost para iwas gastos sa kanilang pagtatanim,” he added.

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MAFC Chairperson Lic-paen shares some of his experiences in organic farming.

In line with this, he aims to prove that organic farming is more sustainable and just as profitable as conventional farming since it can help increase farm productivity by avoiding depletion of soil health.

A 2016 study from the Journal of Environmental Science and Management in Quezon confirmed that the use of synthetic fertilizers damages the natural balance in the soil. Also, synthetic fertilizer application leads to higher farming expenses, thereby lowering benefits from crop production.

Meanwhile, Mountain Province Provincial AFC (PAFC) Chairperson Ramon Calde, Sr. shared that he practices fermentation of plant juices in making organic fertilizers for longer shelf life. He also offers training to farmers about this technique and organic agriculture in general.

Calde also revealed that organic farming allows

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PCAF passes ISO 9001:2015 surveillance audit



PCAF maintains its International Organization for Standardization (ISO) 9001:2015 recertification as the agency passed its first surveillance audit on October 24, 2022.

Surveillance audit is a periodic audit conducted by a certification body to ensure that an organization or agency still meets the ISO standard requirements.

In the case of PCAF, an audit team from the Worldwide Quality Assurance (WQA) Philippines, Incorporated, led by Kristine Villaruel, assessed the agency's requirements which includes documented information and evidence about the conformity to all the requirements of ISO standards, and other applicable statutory and regulatory requirements.

The audit team also checked the performance monitoring, measuring, reporting and reviewing

procedures against key performance objectives and targets, and verified the effectiveness of the implementation of corrective actions after the specified period.

The scope of PCAF's Quality Management System (QMS) is participatory planning, monitoring and policy making in agriculture and fishery sectors including related support services. Meanwhile, the auditees include the top management, quality management representatives, internal audit, core and support services.

"Congratulations to all of us for passing the surveillance audit! I know we can be better next year by simply following the guidelines and following the timelines," said PCAF Executive Director Nestor D. Domenden.

(Visit www.pcaf.da.gov.ph for the complete story) ■

him to use the fields, after harvesting heirloom rice, in cultivating fishes like Japanese Eel. This gives him a continuous livelihood since heirloom rice is only good for one cropping per year.

Given these safe farming methods, Calde's farm was able to acquire the Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) Certification and the Agricultural Training Institute's Accreditation of a Learning Site for Agriculture.

"Bukod sa organic farming, gusto din namin ituro yung paggamit ng organic feeds sa mga alagang manok at tilapia kasi mahal yung feeds sa market," Calde continued.

Ob-ob-fo and Aluyan: The Bayanihan of Cordillera

Bayanihan has always been part of Filipino Culture. It is an activity, in which the community participates to offer help or support in times of need.

In Cordillera, the AFCs are able to maintain this tradition and integrate it to their farming activities.

There are two terms that the AFCs used in describing the exchange of labor in their farms: "Ob-ob-fo or Ug-ug-bu" and "Aluyan".

"Yung ug-ug-bu ay pagtutulungan ng mga farmers. Halimbawa, may limang farmers na nagkasundo na tulong-tulong sila sa pag-ani. Ngayong araw, dito tayo sa farm ko, sa susunod na araw ay sa kabilang farm naman. Ganoon din ang ginagawa sa pagtanim kasi mahal na din ang labor cost," Calde explained.

According to Calde and Lic-paen, ob-ob-fo/ug-ug-bu is being regularly practiced in the municipalities of Bauko and Bontoc.

In one of the conversations in Itogon, MAFC Chairperson Romeo Casilla shared that this type of Bayanihan is also being practiced in their municipality and is called aluyan.

Some AFC members also buy the lettuce of other farmers that are not up to market standard to help them stay in business.

"May lettuce kasi na maliit, di yun pasado sa market. Binibili namin tapos pinapamigay sa iba para hindi masayang," Casilla added.

Aside from this, Itogon MAFC members, who are involved in apiculture, offer beekeeping training to those interested for additional source of income.

Meanwhile, Sagada MAFC Chairperson Osenio Lay-os conveyed another type of Bayanihan among AFCs in their municipality.

Before the pandemic happened, he recounted how farmers organize themselves every Saturday for the "Garden Day". In this activity, they would install a stand near the municipal hall to help each other sell their produce.

Now, some members co-operate a stall in the public market for the same purpose.

On the other hand, La Trinidad MAFC Chairperson Andy Colte, Sr. shared how farmers also come together during festivals to promote their bountiful agriculture and rich heritage.

"Lahat talaga nagparticipate sa mga festivals like the Strawberry Festival and the Adivay Festival to promote their agricultural products pati yung history nila," Colte said.



Itogon MAFC Chairperson Casilla holds newly picked cabbage from his organic farm.



Sagada MAFC Chairperson Lay-os shows the green beans used in the Sagada Gold Coffee during the short tour in their association's roastery.



La Trinidad MAFC Chairperson Colte shares some of the festivities that highlight Bayanihan in the strawberry and rose capital of the Philippines.

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Itogon MAFC Chairperson Casilla shares his aluyan experiences in Itogon. Listening to him is Pambansang Mannelon-Maguuma-Magbabaul-Magsasaka ng Pilipinas (P4MP) President Guadaleva Coteng.

Colte also shared that they closely coordinate with the local government unit (LGU) and actively participate in the programs of the Department of Agriculture to efficiently address issues related to agriculture.

In a way, this collaboration between the AFCs and the government showcases a type of Bayanihan that is directed towards improving Philippine agriculture and enhancing the livelihood of Filipino farmers and fisherfolk.

The stories of the AFCs in Cordillera, on how they value tradition and weave it to every thread of innovation, give a glimpse on how people take care of their culture and agriculture.

This proves that there is more to discover and learn about this region, from its vast mountains down to its colorful traditions. ■

How LGUs' support empowers private sector participation in agri-fishery sector

In the series of interviews with the AFC officers and members of the Bicol Region and Cordillera Administrative Region (CAR) for the Lakbay Panayam, there is one thing in common.

It is the support of the local chief executives (LCE) and the local government units (LGU) to PCAF's AFCs in their functions as the voice and the bridge of farmers, fishers and other stakeholders at the local level.

AFC is PCAF's mechanism for private sector participation in the development processes at the national, regional, provincial and municipal levels.

Over the years, some LGUs have been acknowledging the importance of AFCs by providing logistical and financial support. The LCEs have also involved the AFCs through participation in planning, monitoring and evaluation, and resolving issues confronting the agriculture and fisheries sector.

Unfortunately, this is not always the case. Some AFCs are not recognized by their LCEs for various reasons.

The DA has been vocal in advocating and establishing a strong collaboration among the LGUs, academe, and private sectors, like AFCs, in promoting DA's programs, activities and projects down to the grassroots level.

This was proven during the height of the pandemic when the partnership between the LGU and the AFCs was strengthened. Hand-in-hand, they worked to boost agricultural productivity, provide nutritious meals to every family, and increase the incomes of small farmers and fishers in their communities.

"During the pandemic, agriculture has proven its worth. LGU in Baguio City launched a lot of programs. This resulted in active participation of youth in agriculture, a rise of urban agriculture, strengthening the existence of farmers and fisherfolks groups and

associations, widening the scopes of credit and loans for agriculture, and more," said CAR RAFC Chairperson Ryan Palunan.

Its LGU tapped the expertise of the AFCs in bringing the programs to the outskirts of the city.

The young RAFC chairperson also shared how the municipality of Itogon strengthens its farmer cooperatives and associations.

He mentioned that with the support of its LGU, the Municipal AFC (MAFC) of Itogon can regularly conduct orientation on various agriculture programs and can help the town in organizing groups at the barangay level.

This would create opportunities for the farmers to know more and access suitable programs for their commodities. MAFCs in Itogon are also part of their local development council (LDC) where they can express their needs and suggestions for the sector.

"Through the help and expertise of the AFCs, we want to tap the potential of agriculture here in Itogon. As we all know, Itogon is a mining town and gold is a finite resource. We also want to develop the agricultural sector," said Itogon Mayor Bernard Waclin.

Itogon Municipal Agriculturist, Dr. Prudencio Pedro also said that on top of the mining industry, the first-class municipality has the potential for growing lowland and highland vegetables and livestock production.

Meanwhile, the AFCs in La Trinidad maintain close coordination with their LGU. They are regularly invited to their management committee meetings where they share the issues and concerns of the industry.

Chairperson Palunan also added that in La Trinidad, Benguet, the integration of MAFC in its LDC proves its importance for the passage of ordinances needed

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Enduring varieties: Heirloom rice farming as a testament to Cordilleran perseverance

For generations, Cordillera heirloom rice varieties have weathered an unforgiving climate and the harshest of terrains, and have developed resilience against pests and diseases which could devastate even newer hybrid varieties.

In a way, the plight of the very farmers who continue to cultivate them mirrors the heirloom rice varieties' story of survival and endurance.

Some stories resonate dedication and passion towards heirloom rice and one of the notable narratives is that of Ramon Calde, Sr.

Chairperson Calde has been part of the Agricultural and Fishery Council (AFC) since 2013 and currently serves as the Provincial AFC (PAFC) Chairperson of Mountain Province.

In an interview, he shared how he combined his extensive knowledge of organic farming and meticulous rice crop management to continue producing balatinaw and gilgilang varieties, which have been passed from generation to generation in their family.

"Our family has been planting heirloom rice, from my ancestors to my grandparents to my parents," according to PAFC Chair Calde, whose family also received a Gawad

Saka Award for Outstanding Farmer/Fisherfolk Family at the regional level in 2013.

PAFC Chairperson Calde's integrated farm is a demo farm that hosts action research and training on heirloom rice farming and organic fertilizer production. They promote the use of composting, local sunflowers, Azolla, and rice hulls, as a more sustainable solution to rising fertilizer prices.

Like how heirloom rice varieties pass on their most desirable traits, heirloom rice farmers continue to observe and celebrate the rich history and unique cultural practices associated with rice farming.

According to Coulen Lic-paen, Municipal AFC (MAFC) Chairperson of Bontoc, Mountain Province, communal farming practices ("ogfu") and special holidays ("tengao") during planting and harvesting seasons are still observed in their town. Residents from Itogon, Benguet also continue to produce heirloom rice wine, which their MAFC members endearingly referred to as a practice of the "true Igorot".

These traditions are even observed in Baguio City,

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PCAF conducts 1st Ugnayan at Agri-Talakayan sa Gulayan

PCAF conducted its first Ugnayan at AgriTalakayan sa Gulayan in Baguio City on October 12 to 13, 2022.

The word “Ugnayan” aims to continuously link as well as enhance the partnerships between and among the private and the government sectors, while “AgriTalakayan” envisions to develop shared understanding on pressing issues affecting the vegetable value chain system and come up with a collective action towards supportive policies to ensure food security and resiliency amid the challenges.

The two-day activity aimed to develop a shared understanding among the industry stakeholders on the impact of urban agriculture on rural vegetable production and the existence of a resilient vegetable supply chain management system.

It also provided shared current vegetable market outlook and support initiatives that can complement the participants.

The participants were also able to suggest various policy recommendations and draw attention to actions and systematic approaches that must be taken throughout the vegetable food system to deliver better



NBPC on High Value Crops-Fruits and Vegetables Chairperson Dr. Mary Ann Sayoc presents the CIR on Fruits and Vegetables.

outcomes by the concerned agencies and organizations.

National Banner Program Committee on High Value Crops-Fruits and Vegetables Chairperson, Dr. Mary Ann Sayoc presented the recently-approved Philippine Vegetable Industry Roadmap, while Department of Agriculture High Value Crops Development Production Focal Person on Onion, Arnold Timoteo presented the Onion Industry Roadmap. ■

PCAF opens Visayas-wide AFC Congress, performance review

PCAF opened on Tuesday, October 11, the back-to-back AFC Visayas Congress and Areawide Participatory Performance Review and Planning Workshop in Leyte.

In partnership with the Department of Agriculture-Regional Field Office (DA-RFO) VIII the three-day event aims to provide a venue to address issues common to the Visayas regions and discuss the DA’s policy directions and initiatives.

In her opening remarks, OIC-Regional Executive Director Angel Enriquez lauded the Agricultural and Fishery Council (AFC) volunteers from across the Visayas for their efforts to assist the government through their relevant policy recommendations and reliable monitoring reports.

“Bakit kayo nandito ngayon? May sahod ba kayo? No. You are here because of your dedication and passion to serve,” said Enriquez.

Noting the country’s aging population of farmers, Dir. Enriquez encouraged learning and knowledge transfers in the sector.

“We need the experience and wisdom you can share with the Department of Agriculture,” she said.

Meanwhile, Leyte Governor Carlos Jericho Petilla delivered the keynote on the importance of technology and financial support for farmers and fisherfolk.

“Everything is technology-driven. Technology is a front-runner if we want to compete these days,” said Gov. Petilla.

He explained the importance of adopting the right technology for farming and fishery to boost production and profitability while maintaining food safety.

According to Gov. Petilla, the government sector is impeded by frequent leadership changes, so the private sector—like the AFCs—provides continuity to successful programs and projects.

RAFC Eastern Visayas Chairperson Engr. Miguel Pedroso praised the AFCs for motivating one another, as well as the government for its support.

“Tayo ang nakakaalam ng problema sa ground, tayo din ang makakagawa ng solusyon. As volunteer leaders, we are uplifting the lives of farmers and fishers. Kailangan natin ng suporta ng isa’t-isa at ng gobyerno,” he said.

The DA-RFO VIII gathered more than 100 AFC leaders and members composed of regional and provincial AFC Chairpersons, RAFC Executive Officers, Coordinators, and Regional Sectoral Committee Chairpersons from Central, Eastern, and Western Visayas.

The AFCs will create policy resolutions related to women’s rights in the A&F sector, rural development value-chain in the Visayas, and urban and peri-urban agriculture under the theme “Volunteers Making a Difference the AFC Way: Adaptive, Flexible, and Creative Towards the New Normal.”

PCAF, the DA’s policy-making arm, will hold the final leg of the AFC Congress in Butuan City on October 25-28, 2022. (Report from PDD Chief Melinda Quiñones) ■



Samples of the heirloom rice from Chairperson Calde's rice mill.

particularly in Brgy. Happy Hollow, the home of RAFC Chairperson Ryan Palunan, the youngest Regional AFC (RAFC) Chairperson in the history of the AFC. When “kanyaw” is held in Brgy. Happy Hollow as a post-harvest celebration, all are invited regardless of their ethnicity (Ibaloi, Kankanaey, Kalanguya, etc.).

According to RAFC Chairperson Palunan, “our agricultural rituals and special occasions are unique and are something to be proud of, so we should preserve them for the next generations.”

But the preservation of these customs, and even heirloom rice farming as an industry, is now an uphill battle due to urbanization, climate change, and economic concerns. Areas that used to produce heirloom rice are now shifting to high-value crops, and in worse cases, are being abandoned.

Before the 1990 earthquake, Brgy. Happy Hollow used to be the “rice granary” of Baguio City. However, the calamity affected their terrain and water sources, with the last reported planting of heirloom rice taking place in the early 2000s. The residents of Happy Hollow are also facing the threats brought by urbanization with ancestral domain issues.

Up until the post-war years, the town of Itogon was also self-sufficient in terms of rice production, and can even supply the whole Benguet area. Sadly, with the decreasing number of farmers due to the aging farmer population and the conversion of farmlands to residential areas and resorts, their rice production continues to decline.

Heirloom rice needed support

MAFC Itogon Chairperson Romeo Casilla said: “We need to protect the heirloom rice industry. We should design and promote ways to encourage locals to continue



RAFC Chairperson Palunan shares some of the farming traditions in Baguio City.

planting them. Through the rice focal persons, we should work towards increasing heirloom rice production.”

Rice focal persons, like Jay Sano of the Municipal Agriculture Office (MAO) of La Trinidad, are working tirelessly to increase rice production and to solve the various issues faced by rice farmers.

Even though their farmers are prioritizing high-value crops like vegetables and strawberries, the MAO of La Trinidad continues to provide much-needed training and support to them, through fertilizer subsidies and training on pest control and new technologies, like the Rice Crop Manager Software of the International Rice Research Institute.

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Other projects supporting the heirloom rice farmers of Cordillera include training on the more sustainable System of Rice Intensification (SRI) method, new infrastructures (irrigation, bridges, and pathways), and a recent project of the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources to provide heirloom rice farmers with tilapia to supplement their food production.

A Commodity Industry Roadmap (CIR) specifically for heirloom rice is also being prepared, according to RAFC Chairperson Palunan. CIRs serve as blueprints and guides to help industry stakeholders apply a value chain approach to increase their yields and incomes, realizing inclusive growth for the sector.

The Municipal Agriculturist of Sagada, Carmen Fomegas, also called for a separate banner program for heirloom rice, since regular rice programs focus mostly on hybrid and certified varieties, which might be incompatible with highland areas.

Interventions more compatible with highland areas were also suggested by the AFCs, with MAFC of Itogon suggesting the distribution of more heirloom rice planting materials, and MAFC of Bontoc suggesting the provision of machinery more suitable to their terrain since their rice fields are narrower compared to lowland areas.

According to RAFC Chairperson Palunan, "newer technologies should be combined with indigenous knowledge to increase production and to keep up with demand."

In terms of demand, heirloom rice farmers are currently

exporting to the United States and are also selling their surplus in Baguio and Manila, indicating that there is a growing market for them. Bontoc MAFC Chairperson Licpaen said that this could be a sign that we need to prepare the local heirloom rice industry to be more competitive on a global scale and to explore and establish more market linkages.

The MAFC members of Itogon also pointed out that since heirloom rice is sold at a higher price, its profitability and marketability could be demonstrated and promoted to local farmers and agri-entrepreneurs, which in turn could encourage them to invest and commit more to producing heirloom rice.

The preservation of the Cordillera heirloom rice would not only maintain the desired genetic traits of this commodity, but would also uphold and sustain the rich tradition of rice farming in the region, along with the unique agricultural rituals and practices. Like the communal farming practice of "og-ogfu", the preservation of these enduring rice varieties is now a collective issue that demands the attention of the whole agri-fishery sector.

Notwithstanding all the stories and support needed for the industry, farmers like PAFC Chairperson Calde and RAFC Chairperson Palunan still continue to hold on to their cultural heritage through acknowledging the importance of heirloom rice and championing its continued supply amid the myriad of issues and concerns affecting this traditional commodity. ■

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How LGUs' support...

in agriculture. Farmer groups can freely discuss their issues and concerns and actively participate in public consultations to propose ordinances for the agriculture sector.

"Maliban sa mga issues, nakakabigay rin kami ng mga suggestions at recommendations namin sa LGU. Kapag may mga projects at programs sa agriculture, katulad ng seed distribution, kami sa Barangay AFC hanggang sa MAFC ang pinagkakatiwalaan nila. Kami rin ang nagmomonitor ng mga programs nila," shared La Trinidad MAFC Chairperson Andy Colte, Sr.

With the support of the LGUs and LCEs to the AFCs,

private stakeholders can bring about collective action for the agri-fishery development initiatives in their respective areas.

As strategic partners, AFCs can also help the LGU to evaluate programs, policies and projects and give feedback on how these are implemented and can affect the lives of their constituents.

The complementation of both sectors' efforts with the national government can create meaningful steps toward achieving competitive and sustainable growth in agriculture. ■

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