

RESEARCH FOR DEVELOPMENT BARDIGEST

The official magazine of the Department of Agriculture-Bureau of Agricultural Research



**A man with progress
and big dreams:
Road to becoming
a “Best MAYA Intern”**

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ABOUT THE COVER

Thousands of youth aspired to be part of the Mentoring and Attracting Youth in Agribusiness (MAYA) program of the Department of Agriculture. But only four percent made it in. Among them was Dan Marc Manangkila, an Animal Science graduate at the Central Mindanao University. He knew what he wanted—to become an excellent player in the livestock production. His passion for learning never ceases and his love for agriculture endures. With his determination and hard work, he was awarded as one of the 26 Best MAYA interns. Using what he has learned during this internship program, he vows to build his own livestock farm and pass on the knowledge.

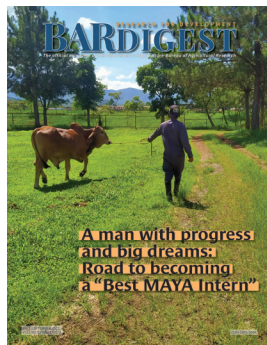


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BAR R4D DIGEST is the quarterly magazine of the Department of Agriculture-Bureau of Agricultural Research.

This magazine contains feature stories on the latest technologies and breakthroughs in agriculture and fishery research for development (R4D) based on the studies and researches conducted by the member-institutions of the National Research & Development System for Agriculture and Fisheries.

The bureau was established to lead and coordinate the agriculture and fishery R4D in the country.

The editorial board welcomes comments and suggestions from readers. Reach us via our email kmisd@bar.gov.ph and our social media accounts [f](#) [@](#) [v](#) [DABAROfficial](#).

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Agricultural Magazine of the Year
2007 Binhi Awards

Best News Magazine
2003 Gawad Oscar Florendo

Engaging the youth in agri-fishery through agribusiness mentoring

by Agriculture Secretary William D. Dar, Ph.D.



As the world continues to battle a pandemic, the government has adopted strategies and measures to ensure production of food and sustain livelihood and income of the farming and fishing communities.

The Filipino youth is a key driver to ensure the attainment of a food-secure and resilient Philippine agriculture, leading to a better performing economy, today and in succeeding years.

Farmers in the Philippines are on average 60 years of age, so we need to attract entrepreneurs and young people to replace these individuals after their retirement.

To achieve this, the Mentoring and Attracting Youth in Agribusiness (MAYA) Program was launched providing the youth an opportunity to get involved in agri-fishery enterprises through experiential learning.

The MAYA Program, coordinated by the DA-Bureau of Agricultural Research with funding support from the Bayanihan to Recover as One Act (Bayanihan 2), aimed to develop a young cadre of both future highly-skilled government officials and highly-competitive agribusiness entrepreneurs. It comes in the form of an internship wherein the participants are capacitated through “learning-by-doing” method.

The program was implemented in the different regional field offices, bureaus, and attached agencies located all around the country. From 3,113 applicants, 808 applicants were accepted into the program.

Through the guidance of the handling offices and their partner farmer cooperative/associations, the interns were exposed to office work or agriculture entrepreneurial activities. The program has two tracks that the interns can freely choose and follow: The Employment Track which aimed to train the interns to become the future successor of the departments and its agencies, and the Entrepreneurial Track which challenged the interns to create competitive agricultural products and services that can be integrated into the food chain value.

Towards the end of the program, best performing interns from each handling office were given recognition. Ten interns were given cash support for their agribusiness plans. The MAYA Program continues even after the end of the internship in hopes that the interns will become successful government employees and entrepreneurs.

The massive influx received during the opening of applications for the program indicates that we have a lot of youth who are into agriculture but do not have the necessary opportunities. Moreover, it was interesting to hear that our youth interns were able to gain experience and enjoy the process of the program. Their experiences and learnings were showcased in this third quarter issue of BAR R4D Digest. ■



Mentoring the youth as the country's future agriculture and fisheries frontliners

by Dr. Vivencio R. Mamaril

Driven by its vision of a “food secure and resilient Philippines with empowered and prosperous farmers and fisherfolk,” the Department of Agriculture (DA) implements several programs and creates various action plans. And part of the reboot strategy is to mobilize, capacitate, and develop the next generation to become the country's agriculture and fisheries frontliners.

Agriculture Secretary William Dar puts his high hopes in harnessing the potential of the youth contributory to making Philippine agriculture modern, industrialized, and competitive.

This prompted the department, through the DA-Bureau of Agricultural Research, to launch the Secretary's brainchild—the Mentoring and Attracting Youth in Agribusiness (MAYA) program funded under the Bayanihan to Recover as One Act also known as the Bayanihan 2.

After the social media announcement, the MAYA Program secretariat received a massive influx of applicants nationwide—interested on the internship program aimed to transform a cadre of young Filipinos into highly skilled, committed workers, and future officials in the government, as well as innovative, and highly competitive “agripreneurs” or technocrats.

Ages ranging from 20 to 30 years old, graduates of any four- to six-year college degree courses were entitled to apply. After the screenings and interviews, 808 interns were accepted, receiving a monthly allowance of PhP 20,000.

On 10 March 2021, Secretary Dar led the ceremonial handing over of “Notice of Award” to some of the accepted interns at the DA central office in Quezon City, with simultaneous activities conducted by various handling offices.

The accepted interns, majority of which are agriculture and fisheries-related graduates, were assigned under the employment or entrepreneurial tracks in the different handling offices: DA central office, regional field offices, bureaus, and attached agencies and corporations.

This third quarter issue will provide you a sneak peek of the MAYA program and how it created impact in the lives of the youth.

Three handling offices, through their MAYA focals, discussed the internship program, curriculum, and work activities provided to the interns and how they mentored them. Specifically, the entrepreneurship track covered hands-on trainings and deployment on various agribusiness activities: inputs and primary production, actual farming and agro-processing, and agribusiness activities. On the other hand, employment track provided a venue for interns to perform office work assignments to prepare them in the formal economy.

Three interns who won in best MAYA photo journey contest shared their experiential learnings and journey.

Prior to program culmination, MAYA interns were requested to prepare an agribusiness plan, of which 20 intern finalists were selected to pitch. Ten MAYA interns won in the DA's “Success Begins at 40K: Best MAYA Micro-Agribusiness Plan” competition. Interns of the winning agribusiness plans on scented virgin coconut oil, squid products, and marinated and deboned *bangus* shared their inspiration in developing their products and plans on their ventures.

These innovative and value-adding products reflected entrepreneurial attributes; and marketing and revenue stream. Interns also discussed on planning the operations and production, hence, ensuring business sustainability.

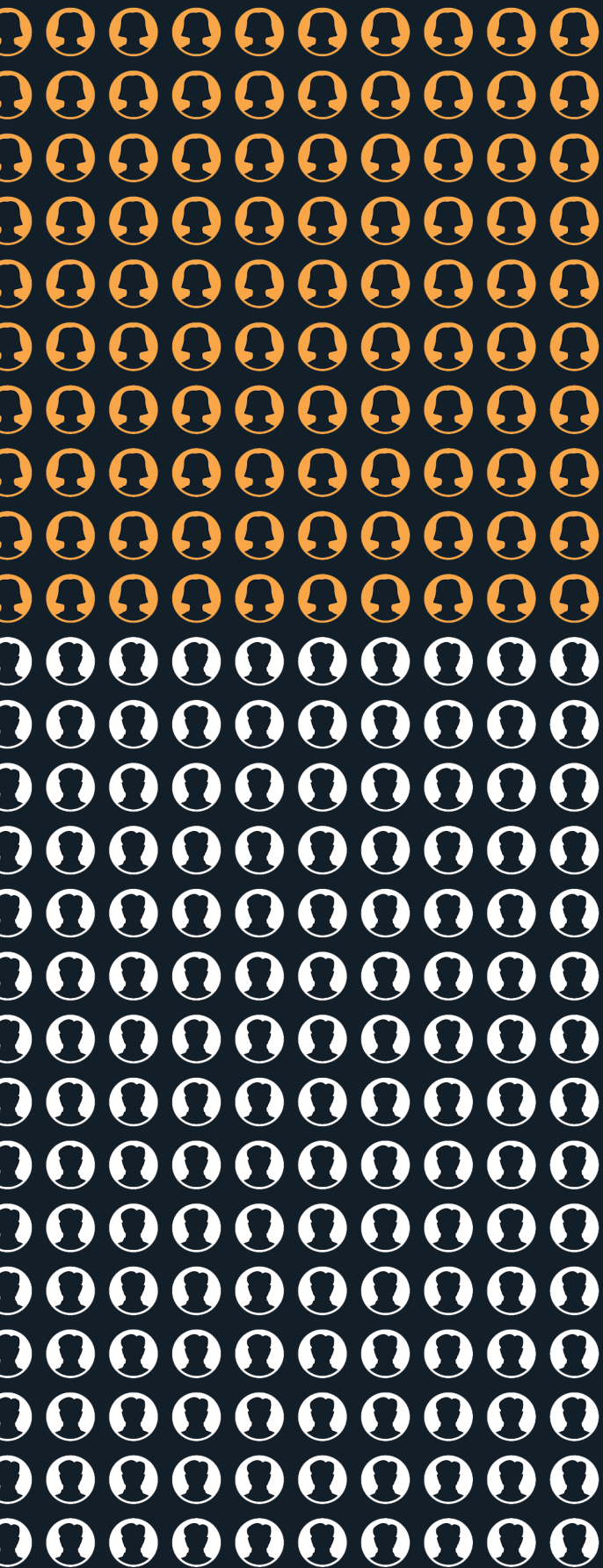
Each holding office also determined their respective best MAYA interns of which 26 won. Two best MAYA interns shared how an unexpected twist of fate and opportunity brought changes and further encouragements in their lives.

During the closing ceremony, a total of 66 interns were hailed as winners based on the three categories, recognizing their efforts and success.

As we flip the pages of this magazine, may we be inspired to work for and with our young generation. Through the MAYA and other DA programs, we all look forward to future stories of young agribusiness entrepreneurs and highly skilled manpower in the sector, contributory to the country's food production system as the new faces of the agri-fishery sector and its industries. ■



MAYA PROGRAM



The Mentoring and Attracting Youth in Agriculture (MAYA) program of the Department of Agriculture (DA) was coordinated by DA-Bureau of Agricultural Research that aims to transform a cadre of young Filipinos into agripreneurs or technocrats.



2021 15-week internship program



Php 20,000 monthly allowance

3,703 applications received

3,113 qualified applicants

790 graduated interns

692 interns assigned in the Employment Track

98 interns assigned in the Entrepreneurship Track

700 Agri-fisheries and allied fields graduates

90 Non-Agri-fisheries and allied fields graduates

510 20-24 years old

264 25-29 years old

16 30-35 years old

40 DA handling offices

355 interns in Luzon

198 interns in Visayas

237 interns in Mindanao



10 Best MAYA Agribusiness Plan

Php 40,000 cash prize



26 Best MAYA Interns

Php 7,500 cash prize



30 Best Photo Journey

Php 4,000 cash prize

M BY THE
NUMBERS

Goddess of Magic: Virgin Coconut Oil

by Maria Elena M. Garces



“ The young people today, like me, are now enlightened of its importance to food security and economy. Agriculture is not something to be ashamed of but rather a profession which is something to be proud of.



After quitting her job as an account operation specialist in a private agency, Jessielyn Alfuentes of Lu-op, Diplahan, Zamboanga Sibugay, saw the MAYA internship program advertisement on Facebook. Without any expectations, she applied to the program and felt blessed when she was accepted and given the opportunity to practice her undergraduate course on Bachelor of Science in Agricultural Technology.

As an intern assigned at the Department of Agriculture (DA)-Philippine Rubber Research Institute, Jess, as she is fondly called, learned the importance of rubber industry to the economy. She became more interested when she met rubber farmers and heard their success stories. Her mentors would always tell her, "If you want to become rich, do business."

The beginning of the Goddess of Magic

Bearing that in mind, Jess was excited and pressured when her agribusiness plan was chosen as one of the winners in the 10 Best MAYA Micro-Agribusiness Plan.

Jess personally uses the virgin coconut oil for her hair and skin because of its wonderful benefits, but its natural smell oftentimes puts her off. This paved to the development of Jess's Scented Virgin Coconut Oil (VCO), a fusion of aromatic essential oil and magic that comes from the virgin coconut oil, which she dubbed as Goddess of Magic.

DA-Philippine Coconut Authority (2014) reported that VCO is the purest form of coconut oil, white in color, has not undergone oxidation, and obtained from fresh and mature kernel of coconut by mechanical or natural means. Some emerging uses of VCO are

as nutraceutical and functional food, carrier oil for aromatherapy and massage oil, hair conditioner, and body oil or a substitute for moisturizing lotion, among others. The fatty acid composition of the VCO has been known to have antimicrobial, antiviral, and antifungal effects in the body.

One of the top producers of VCO in Zamboanga Sibugay Province, the Bato Farmer's Cooperative also known as BAFAMCO, will be Jess's source of VCO. She then blends this with aromatic essential oil of citronella, eucalyptus, lavender, rose petals, and *sampaguita*, creating various scented products to choose from.

The product has the ability to kill pathogens, reduce inflammation, soothes and heals skin irritation, an effective moisturizer for skin and hair, and as make-up remover, among others.

Jess the entrepreneur

Jess targets to produce 480 bottles a month which will be sold at PhP 99 per 100 mL bottle to salons and spas in selected municipalities in Zamboanga Sibugay as initial target markets. The products will also be sold to retailers, direct buyers, and friends upon order.

According to her, this home-based business is viable and profitable with an average net income of PhP 175,421.17 per year and has a 31 percent return on investment and the payback period is within 3.82 years. Hence, it is a good source of additional income for the young entrepreneurs who wants to venture on a business at their own comfort in the midst of this pandemic.

Jess is optimistic that her Goddess of Magic will be a hit in the market with a number of promotional

activities she is doing like posting and advertising the products in social media and online and direct selling.

As sole proprietor, Jess is responsible in managing, planning, processing, transporting and marketing of the product. She also plans to apply for Intellectual Property Rights for her products' brand.

Her hopes

With her MAYA experience to look back to, Jess is definitely into agriculture more than ever. She envisions a better future for the agriculture and fisheries sector in terms of technology and sustainability.

"The young people today, like me, are now enlightened of its importance to food security and economy. Agriculture is not something to be ashamed of but rather a profession which is something to be proud of," she said.

In fact, she partnered with her brother to purchase a hectare of rice field in a nearby town to start farming in the coming planting season and hopes to expand this farm to include a processing facility for her growing business.

Meanwhile, Jess is presently helping in the family business that includes rice farming, milling, and piggery, when she is not too busy in producing Goddess of Magic.

"*Marami pong salamat sa Department of Agriculture, sa DA-Bureau of Agricultural Research at sa DA-PRRI at naging bahagi ako ng MAYA Program at napili pa na isa sa 10 Best Micro-Agribusiness Plan ang aking pangarap na Goddess of Magic!*" winked Jess. ■

Delightful Mardebangs, anyone?

by Maria Elena M. Garces



Rodney dela Cerna finally decided to apply to the Mentoring and Attracting Youth in Agribusiness (MAYA) Internship Program, two hours before the online registration link closes due to the outpouring number of applicants. Luckily, he was one of the qualified candidates out of the 3,113 applicants to the MAYA Internship Program launched early this year by the Department of Agriculture (DA) and coordinated by the DA-Bureau of Agricultural Research.

High expectations

Prior to MAYA, Rodney was a process engineering supervisor handling the Engineering and Construction Department in a fertilizer manufacturing company in Cebu and is planning to relocate his wife and two kids from Toledo City to Cebu City.

He was already attending online seminars related to agriculture and other viable livelihood options hoping to start his own agribusiness venture before he became a MAYA intern. He was happy because MAYA program offered a lot of opportunities for him, and at the same time a bit scared in taking a huge financial risk when he decided to move and participate in the program.

“I really prepared my mind and came with the right attitude since I thought about the risks and how it would affect not only myself but also my family’s future,” he said thoughtfully.

Rodney expected the MAYA program to be a learning experience, like lectures and exposures on different existing agribusiness technologies, proper farm operations and management practices, various established technologies, business planning, economic evaluation, including plans, and many more.

The pandemic brought about by COVID-19 caused restrictions that limited the deployment of the interns to several technical establishments and institutions that are within the province of Cebu only.

Learnings from exposure

Assigned at the DA-Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR)-Central Visayas, Rodney felt lucky to be supervised by a very accommodating training team. He learned various aquaculture technologies; food processing; utilization of fiber reinforced polymer to make boats, tanks, and other useful materials; and more.

He learned the step-by-step farm operations and best management practices for a sustainable and profitable livelihood at the Carmen Brackishwater Fish Farm, particularly in the agribusiness side of *bangus* culture—from fingerling production, grow-out culture, fish processing, and marketing of fresh produce and products.

“I learned the connection, importance, and that there is always an opportunity at every level in the value- or supply-chain of a commodity. I am convinced that *bangus* culture is a sustainable livelihood and *bangus* processing has a huge business potential in Central Visayas,” he said.

Truly a lucky guy!

Rodney dela Cerna won not only one but two awards!

Being chosen as one of the Best MAYA Interns is significant to Rodney because he knew his profession as chemical engineer is far different from the other interns who are graduate of agriculture or agriculture-related course. But not in their group of MAYA interns assigned in DA-BFAR Central Visayas, where majority of them are graduates of courses not related to agriculture or fisheries.

Even then, Rodney was an example to other interns—having the right attitude and doing the best that he can—made him succeed in everything he does. Besides, he is the *kuya* of their intern group.

He also won as one of the 10 Best MAYA Micro-Agribusiness Plan, with his **Marinated** and **Deboned *Bangus*** which he called **Mardebangs**.

According to Rodney, Mardebangs is based on the concept of deboning and marinating *bangus* while offering a variety of flavors for consumers to enjoy the nutritious and appetizing dish without having to worry about the hassle of removing the bones.

“I came up with the plan after my experience in *bangus* deboning during our fish processing workshop. I liked it because deboning is easy to learn and does not require too many equipment. I’m also toying with the idea of starting my own *bangus* grow-out culture business when I get an opportunity to acquire a fishpond lease agreement to manage my own fishpond so I will have enough raw material for my Mardebangs,” he beamed.

With the prize money he received, Rodney was able to initially produce 50 kilos of Mardebangs and sold it at PHP 320 to 340 per kilo to neighbors, friends, relatives and even tried selling online. But then, he temporarily stopped

processing due to marked up price of *bangus* in the wet market, his only source for raw materials at that time.

To augment the capital money left from the first production of Mardebangs, Rodney is currently working on his application to the Kapital Access for Young Agripreneur, a credit program of Agricultural Credit Policy Council, which offers loans to finance working capital of start-up or existing agri-based projects of young entrepreneurs.

He also joined the Kapatid Agri Mentor Me Program 2021 of Go Negosyo to supplement his skills and knowledge in business management, accounting, supply chain, farm operations and management, among others.

Currently, he is pursuing a master’s degree in Food Science and Technology, “because it is really my dream to set up my own food processing company and start producing my Mardebangs.”

“Being a MAYA intern is actually a humbling experience and unsure whether I made the right decision or not. But I have faith in God. And as long as I am working hard, adept in learning and gaining knowledge, keeping a good attitude, staying focus, and having a clear goal as to what I want to achieve, I believe, nothing could go wrong.” ■

I came up with the plan after my experience in *bangus* deboning during our fish processing workshop. I liked it because deboning is easy to learn and does not require too many equipment.



Meet the woman behind Jam's Pusitsiritsit

by Rena S. Hermoso



On 23 June 2021, the top 10 agribusiness plans for the Mentoring and Attracting Youth in Agribusiness (MAYA) program of the Department of Agriculture (DA) was announced. Among the exhilarated and deserving young agripreneurs was Jamaica B. Ejida, an intern for DA-Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR)-Northern Mindanao.

Jam, as her peers call her, is a registered fisheries technologist. She had a four-year experience working at a private company for shrimp hatchery and grow-out culture farm. But when she learned that she was pregnant along with the looming threat of the COVID-19 pandemic, she had to quit her job.

Unlike other MAYA interns, Jam learned of the program through her partner who was a former scholar of DA-BFAR. A staff member called him to ask if he was interested in joining the program. Curious about the program, she asked what it was all about. Upon learning that she was qualified to apply, she took the chance and signed up.

This writer asked Jam to share her MAYA experience.

What was your most memorable moment during the internship program?

The most unforgettable moment was when I joined the pitching for the Best MAYA Micro-Agribusiness Plan. My proposal, Jam's Pusitsiritsit, fortunately won and I received PHP 32,000 as capital.

It was noteworthy for me because my name became known and there were radio programs that wanted me as their guest. Through this, I was able to inspire a lot of young people, like me, to engage in agri-fishery business.

Actually, it was also the reason why DA-BFAR-Northern Mindanao, my handling office, hired me as an aquaculturist at Camiguin Provincial Field Office. I will use this opportunity to inspire the youth to help contribute to the economy of the nation through agriculture and fisheries.

What is Jam's Pusitsiritsit?

It was inspired by a Filipino folk song, Sitsiritsit Alibangbang (which means "butterfly" in Ilonggo). It reflects how the squid product looks like an inverted butterfly when processed.

There will be two products: dried squid and squid chicharon that will be available in classic, spicy, sweet, and sweet and spicy flavors.

The idea of this business is to utilize the abundant supply of squid in the province into a product with long shelf life. With this, we can prevent postharvest losses and at the same time maintain the nutritive value of the squid product especially now that we are in the new normal.

Using the cash prize as capital, I am glad to announce that Jam's Pusitsiritsit will be launching soon. I will be utilizing Facebook as a platform for marketing and selling. Through this channel, I will be able to reach more customers.

What advice did you receive from your mentors at your handling office?

I am very grateful to the supportive mentors and coordinators at DA-BFAR-Northern Mindanao. They advised us *to do our job responsibly and effectively* and to be a responsible and respectful individual. They have inspired us and opened our minds to engage in agri-fishery business and be

innovative, and highly competitive entrepreneurs.

How will you use what you have learned from this internship experience moving forward?

Right now, I am employed as an aquaculturist. My experience during the internship is very helpful and applicable in my current job. I will use the knowledge I gained to influence and inspire my fellow youth to be part of this organization and help contribute to our country. *We can still do more.*

Please say a few words to convince the youth, like yourself, to engage in the agriculture and fisheries sector.

I know most of the youth are not interested in agriculture and fisheries because we all know that it literally requires working under the sun. It is a very difficult work; but at the same time, you continue to gain knowledge and make better strategies to handle technical matters.

Fisheries was not really my first choice for a career. In fact, I don't know much about it. But then I had this feeling that I could relate to it because my father is a fisherman. That's when I started to appreciate how amazing and important fisheries is to me and to our nation. Food is one of the most basic needs a person has to have to survive and live a happy life. Agriculture and fisheries provide food for our nation and the future generations. *I realized my purpose.* I know that it is not easy; but I believe that the challenges I experience will help, guide, and mold me to be a better version of myself. ■

DISCLAIMER: This interview has been edited and condensed.



A man with Road to be

by Jireh Alodia R. Laxamana

Life experience is, indeed, the best teacher for such a man like Dan Marc U. Manangkila. For every step he took, be it small or big, his collective experiences have given him his needed exposure to all aspects of life. As a man of progress and big dreams, he truly went after many things to learn and grow more— never expecting the success and happiness that were waiting for him down the road.

Life before MAYA Program

A graduate of Bachelor of Science in Agriculture major in Animal Science at the Central Mindanao University—Dan Marc, prior his application to the Mentoring and Attracting Youth in Agribusiness (MAYA) program of the Department of Agriculture (DA), was first an employee of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources-Provincial Environment and Natural Resources Office under Microdata System and Management, Inc.

Then, after six months of his training in Animal Production Ruminant NC II in Sumilao, Bukidnon under the Kiulab Integrated Skills and Development Center, Inc., he was hired as seed germinator at the SL Agritech Corp.

However, one fateful scrolling through a social media news feed on 9 February 2021 changes everything when Dan Marc's interest and attention were caught by the MAYA internship program post.

h progress and big dreams: becoming a “Best MAYA Intern”

Taking the chance, making a jump

To enhance his prior knowledge and past experiences with agriculture, specifically in raising livestock animals, he then applied for the internship program. With a drive and passion for livestock production and management, it was indeed destiny that assigned him to the DA-Bureau of Animal Industry (BAI).

“My heart was flowing with gratefulness that I was chosen as one of the interns. I can say that excitement was really visible in my eyes, much more than I have known that I will be assigned at BAI. My excitement expands because I know I will be learning more about livestock production, such as raising cows,” Dan Marc said.

With big dreams of venturing and exercising his skills in livestock production, as well as becoming excellent in this industry—he then embarked on a new journey. However, just like what the other interns have felt, he, too, felt so nervous yet excited upon arriving at DA-BAI in Malaybalay, Bukidnon.

Lessons learned and earned

Throughout his MAYA internship journey, he learned the hands-on artificial insemination; health, forage, production, and livestock management; and use of farm machinery.

“I also learned that although we already had knowledge and skills, or even though we are capable enough to handle something—it

does not mean that we should already stop. We should learn more as I believe that learning is an unending process. The word ‘enough’ should never be enough. We should crave for more knowledge and skills to become equipped and competent to be able to serve effectively and efficiently to contribute to the progress of society,” he emphasized.

He applied for the program with the humble intention of wanting to offer his capabilities and acquiring novel knowledge; however, little did Dan Marc know that his determination, love for agriculture, and perseverance would earn him an award, “Best MAYA Intern,” three of the many reasons why he was deserving of the said title.

“I never expected that I will be one of the best MAYA interns. I was just enjoying and doing my duty with all that I can and offer. In spite of that, I was so happy and grateful that I was chosen to be one,” he said with gratitude.

When asked about how he will use what he has learned from the experience moving forward, Dan

Marc said that he will build his own livestock farm to provide work to the people and to help newbies in livestock farming. His experiences will serve as his stepping stone in establishing a sustainable farm and good source of food; hence, income for others.

A message from the best MAYA intern to the youth

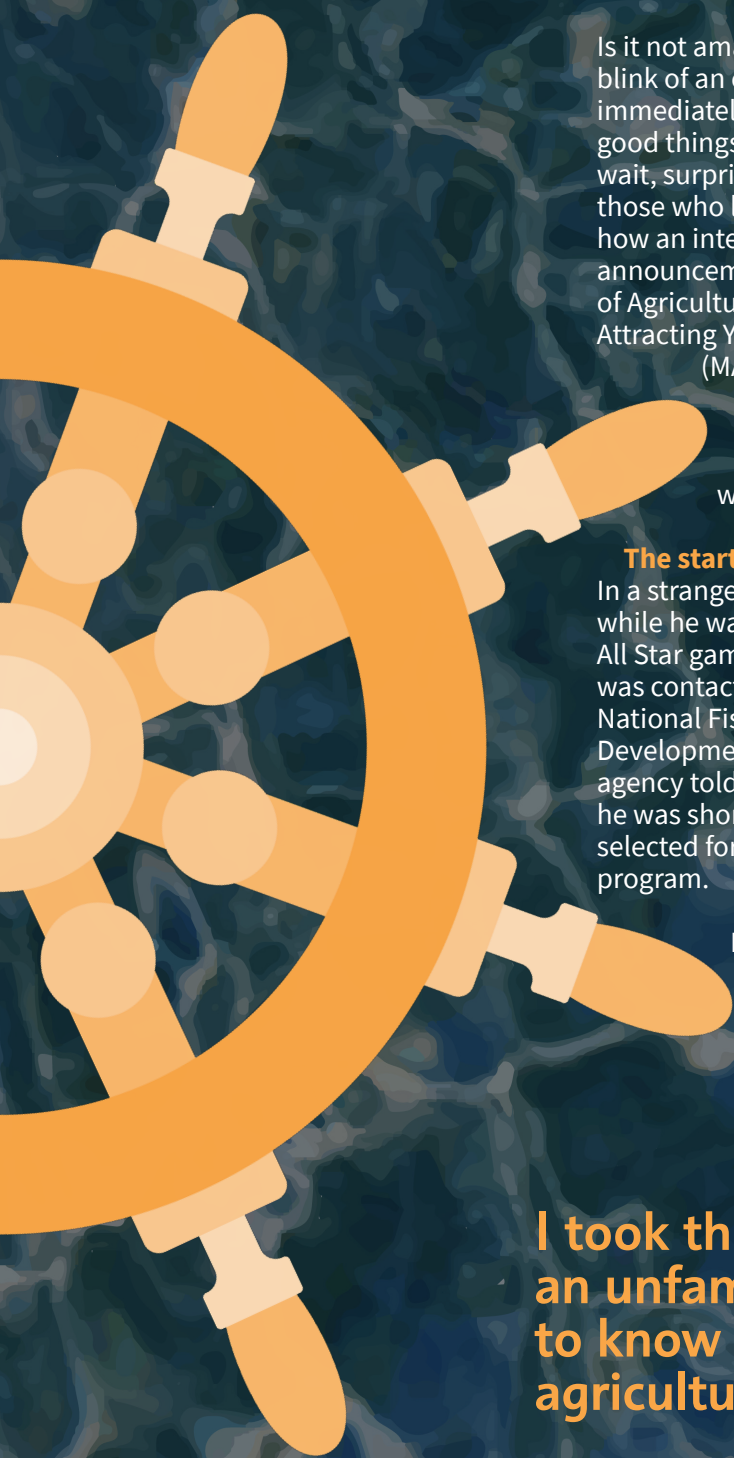
When asked about his words of encouragement to convince the youth to also engage in the agriculture and fisheries sector—Dan Marc said that, “Agriculture, a word that lifts everyone from hunger, is also a word of life and healthiness. Hence, we the youth is the hope of the next generation. We should not let hunger [prevail], as well as we should protect and engage ourselves in the sector of agriculture.”

The DA-MAYA Program definitely became his biggest encouragement to pursue his passion, skills, and profession. In the kind words of Dan Marc, the program allowed him to realize a lot of positivity in life; and hopefully through it and him, more agripreneurs would be inspired to give quality service and products. ■

We should learn more as I believe that learning is an unending process. The word ‘enough’ should never be enough. We should crave for more knowledge and skills to become equipped and competent to be able to serve effectively and efficiently to contribute to the progress of society.

Braving the unfamiliar

How an agriculture graduate



Is it not amazing that in just a blink of an eye, some things can immediately change? Just like how good things come to those who wait, surprising news also fly to those who least expect it—exactly how an internship acceptance announcement for the Department of Agriculture’s (DA) Mentoring and Attracting Youth in Agribusiness (MAYA) program found its way to Nehemiah Joseph D. Manalo in the comfort of his home while watching a show.

The start of something new

In a strange twist of fate and while he was watching an NBA-All Star game, Nehemiah Joseph was contacted by the DA-National Fisheries Research and Development Institute (NFRDI). The agency told him specifically that he was shortlisted and eventually selected for the said internship program.

Being overjoyed was his initial feeling, but it was soon replaced with skepticism and

doubts as he wondered how would an agriculture graduate of the University of the Philippines Los Baños (UPLB) brave the unfamiliar waters of the fisheries sector. Nevertheless, just like the brave soul that he is, he grabbed the opportunity and did not expect the wonders that arrived to him afterwards.

“I took this opportunity as a leap of faith since [the] whole fisheries sector seems like an unfamiliar waters to me. I joined MAYA [under the] fisheries sector because I want to know about the other side of the spectrum that provides food to the people. Both agriculture and fisheries sectors are essential in sustaining and ensuring food security,” Nehemiah Joseph said.

This roller coaster ride called internship

As an intern assigned in the DA-NFRDI, he experienced coordinating with administrative focals in other regional field offices which further helped him improve his professional interaction skills. To add more icing on the cake, he also

I took this opportunity as a leap of faith since [t
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er waters: graduate thrived in the fisheries sector

by Jireh Alodia R. Laxamana

communicated with his co-interns across all regions in the country.

“My experiences in this program have been a blast. I can compare it to a roller coaster ride since it is exuberantly thrilling. Although there are some instances that I was doing things with mixed emotions like excitement to the challenges and fear that I might mess up my task,” Nehemiah Joseph honestly remarked.

He also attended a training on boat and gear inventory, wherein he had been assigned as the Master of the Ceremony or emcee. Nehemiah Joseph openly said that it was literally his first time hosting a formal event such as the training of trainers. Not only this, but he also tried voicing over for their project in National Stock Assessment Project (NSAP).

“I can attest that it really made my confidence level went through the roof. I realized that during my internship there is no such thing as a perfect working environment, especially during this time of the

pandemic. But this did not hinder me to deliver and give my best as well as my co-interns,” he added.

Furthermore, even as an agriculture graduate, Nehemiah Joseph was able to learn and thrive in the fisheries sector. Not only did he learn various things about fisheries as a whole, but he also developed good work ethics within his months into the internship—which then led to him, unsurprisingly, being awarded as one of the best MAYA interns.

A golden opportunity; a once-in-a-lifetime experience

After this MAYA Program internship experience, Nehemiah Joseph started seeing himself as a more polished, disciplined, and confident person in terms of work ethics. If given the opportunity again to be absorbed by the handling offices under the DA, he answered that he had envisioned himself establishing his career in government sector to be of service to the people and community.

He was wholeheartedly grateful for the whole internship experience at the DA-NFRDI and to the DA-Bureau of Agricultural Research because of its complex processes and tasks, which further add to his growth and progress.

When asked about how he could engage his fellow youth into agribusiness, Nehemiah Joseph emphasized the term “golden opportunity.”

“To my fellow youth, I am inviting you to this golden opportunity. The Philippines is a rich country in terms of natural resources; hence, invest and immerse yourself in learning the agricultural and fisheries sector,” Nehemiah Joseph proudly encouraged.

“I guarantee you that it will be one of the most fulfilling decisions in your life,” he ended. ■

**the] whole fisheries sector seems like
er the] fisheries sector because I want
hat provides food to the people. Both
sustaining and ensuring food security.**



This pandemic has wreaked havoc not only to the country but also to the entire world. Strict community restrictions and numerous lockdowns have affected different sectors in the country, agriculture is the major one. Despite that, through the program and efforts of the government, they constituted strategy to cope up with the dilemma we are facing.

Aside from the pandemic, the fact that our farmers are aging and the interest of young generation is not in agriculture are very alarming. How can we assure that we will have food security in the future?

After the training, I already established my own rabbitry and I am also planning to start my own mushroom production that will help me and my family as our source of livelihood.

That is why the Mentoring and Attracting Youth in Agribusiness (MAYA) Program was created. It was aimed to train and encourage young Filipinos to become agri-fishery entrepreneurs or agripreneurs or possible technocrats, training them as future leaders of the Department of Agriculture or in their respective communities and local government units.

As a licensed agriculturist, it is an honor and privilege that I was one of the chosen youth to be part of MAYA program in Central Luzon. As I apply for different jobs to practice my profession, it was very tough to secure a stable job. I had my doubts and what ifs about my chosen career but this program made me realize something very significant in life.

During our internship, we were assigned in different research stations in our region. The Central

Luzon Integrated Agricultural Research Center for Hillyland Development at Botolan, Zambales, equipped me with knowledge and important set of skills that are valuable in my career. I learned different areas of production management for mushroom, high value crops, livestock, and organic agriculture which are possible agri-related business that can be established.

Under the mushroom production project of the station, we were trained in the preparation of tissue culture for grain spawn up to harvesting. Mushroom produce has a short life span; to prolong it

we must do processing. Aside from prolonging the shelf life, it is also a way of value-adding. Mushroom production can be profitable by selling the grain spawn at PhP 120-200 per bottle, fruiting bag for PhP 25-30 each, fresh mushroom produce for up to PhP 400 per kilo, and processed mushroom. It is a potential livelihood for communities.

We also did an hands-on training in the livestock production for goat, swine, and rabbit. We also administered multi-vitamins in goat to prevent diseases and improve their immunity. It was a nerve-wrecking experience at first but after trying you will want to do more. Learning this is a source of making a living because you can be an on-call animal attendant.

Rice hull is a common waste in agriculture. Converting it into carbonized rice hull (CRH) is

literally turning trash into cash. CRH is used as growing media of plants because it is high in carbon. It is a good soil conditioner that improves soil aeration, a profitable livelihood because its price ranges from PhP 100-200 per sack.

We also prepared different concoctions as part of the Organic Agriculture Program of the station. For the high value crops production of the station, we learned the cultural management practices of cacao, coffee, and dragonfruit, as well as asexual propagation.

We were also trained to speak in front of people just like in the extension services of the government. We were assigned to discuss topics related to our degree. With my major being Crop Science, I discussed the harvest and postharvest technologies for crops.

My experience as a MAYA intern opened my eyes and made me realize the potential of agriculture, not only in improving food security but also in increasing production as a livelihood to generate income.

After the training, I already established my own rabbitry and I am also planning to start my own mushroom production that will serve as a source of livelihood for me and my family.

Taking part in empowering agripreneurs to help attain food security and push Philippine agriculture as MAYA intern have taught me a lot and made me realize that—we, youth must take charge now and make a change to transform Philippine agriculture a way better forward. To my fellow youth, let us all cooperate, now is the time! *Ang ating Agrikultura ay paunlarin, para sa ating kinabukasan at kaunlaran ng bayan natin!* ■

A journey of a thousand knowledge towards sustainable future

by Rica Joy M. Nicolas



Empowering the youth through learning by doing

by Jericho L. Nuñez



This year, another learning journey started when I was given a chance to be part of the Mentoring and Attracting Youth in Agribusiness (MAYA) Program of the Department of Agriculture (DA).

For me, it is one of the most productive, innovative, and powerful programs implemented by DA to educate, empower, and expand the knowledge of the youth in handling various agricultural related works.

DA selected the Agricultural Training Institute-International Training Center on Pig Husbandry (ITCPH) as our training ground. Having the chance to work with various professionals from this institution, who shared their experiences, knowledge, and skills made this entire journey relevant while allowing us to achieve professional growth. They welcomed, guided, and even supported us by finding the

most developed and sustainable training sites in the region. As the institution strongly believes in the “learning by doing” principle, they deployed us to various farms across CALABARZON.

My first week at the ITCPH was quite an overwhelming one. I, together with another intern, were assigned to manage 80 heads of swine (4 boars, 76 gilts) at the Boar Testing Center. The daily farm routine included feeding, cleaning, checking of the waterline, anti-bacterial injection, and general farm maintenance. My first few days were very difficult since it was my first time in the swine industry, but the days passed in a glimpse. It turned exciting as the Center helped me in carrying out my assigned task. So the next time I go into a pig farm, I know I can handle things confidently and properly.

The internship opened a lot of opportunities to develop the

knowledge and skills we have acquired in the four corners of our classrooms. Applying it in the field and having the chance to recalibrate our minds made this journey awesome as these training sites served as a hub to train different people from different walks of life especially the small entrepreneurs.

The interns also had the chance to develop professionalism while acquiring confidence in teaching and presenting themselves to the crowds. Our micro-teaching session with the ITCPH technical staff pushed us out of our comfort zones. The constructive criticisms they provided helped us to improve our way of transferring knowledge to our audience.

Aside from the knowledge transfer and mentoring, we also had the chance to visit different agribusinesses across Batangas like Padre Garcia Livestock Market,



Pawikan Reserve at San Juan, Batangas, and Rosario Livestock and Dairy Farming Cooperative to name a few. This resulted in working with smallhold rural farmers and learning from their experiences.

It was also an amazing experience to witness the actual trade between the farmers and buyers which made this entire internship a more powerful tool. Also having the chance to meet different farmer beneficiaries of the Stables and Greens in Lipa and San Benito, Batangas and Sta. Maria Dairy Farm really opened our minds to the reality of agriculture.

Another challenging routine for me was waking up every three o'clock in the morning to check, feed and prepare the cows for milking since this is a new one for me. Hard work really pays off whenever a high volume of milk is produced in a day, not to mention maintaining the

animals in good shape. We really learned a lot from these and I am very proud to contribute to such production.

Imagine all of these combined knowledge from those agripreneurs, farmers, and raisers who are motivated to truly venture in agribusiness. For me, the entire duration of this internship program would really be a great help to all the young professionals in choosing the right way.

Agriculture is a diverse market not just for farmers, raisers, fisherfolk, and youth but also for people coming from different walks of life. Having those people who support and motivate the youth are considered small steps but will surely lead to greater impact.

Through this internship, I gained not only the technical knowledge and skills, but more so, the opportunity to meet new friends

and acquaintances. Cultivating soil, raising animals while improving our knowledge made this whole journey more powerful. As I have always taught my co-interns, we need to use these experiences not just for future jobs but to educate and inspire the youth, friends, and family.

The youth can really make a big difference in today's generation. We are hungry for new knowledge and advanced technology to be globally competitive. We can make a change for a more productive, innovative, and meaningful life ahead.

I hope that DA will continue to train and empower more young "agripreneurs" through their program. As for me, I am grateful for everything that has happened for the past months. I am Jericho, I was mentored through the Department of Agriculture and more attracted to agribusiness. 🍌

A JOURNEY WORTH TAKING

by Gabriel M. Lapuz



But behind this paradise-like experience, I got to see and felt the same hardship and pain that every farmer endures to provide for their family especially in this time of pandemic.



Applying as an intern in the Department of Agriculture's (DA) Mentoring and Attracting Youth in Agribusiness (MAYA) Internship Program is by far one of the best choices I made in my life. I applied to this program with full expectation that I will learn, gain experience, and develop my skills related to agriculture and fisheries and entrepreneurship.

My journey began when I got accepted as one of the MAYA interns along with 14 other interns under the management of the DA-Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) Regional Office 3 where we were given the opportunity to work alongside the hardworking people from the bureau and different technology outreach stations for brackish water, marine water, and fresh water.

Our first few weeks became an adjustment period for me, living away from my family, getting along with fellow interns, familiarizing the system and culture of the bureau, adjusting to work schedules, learning new and unfamiliar concepts, and many others.

Being an agricultural engineering graduate, I am acquainted with the mechanisms and equipment related to farms but not with anything related to the fisheries sector. This is why I struggled to accomplish different tasks at first, but with the help of my work supervisors and fellow interns, I was able to cope up and adjust; thus making each and every work responsibility fulfilling.

During the whole duration of the work immersion, I was able to learn the practices, management, and culture of several commodity species such as tilapia and giant freshwater prawn. I also had a lot of learnings and experiences that I really enjoyed. I got to participate in various webinars facilitated by DA and BFAR Region 3 which further expanded my knowledge related to agriculture and fisheries.

I was able to work on water monitoring which is essential in maintaining the favorable environment condition for the fishes. Also, I experienced cleaning fish ponds and fish tanks which are needed when the water is turbid and low on dissolved oxygen; feeding various aquatic species and pairing tilapia breeders; collecting eggs and tilapia fingerlings that were artificially incubated; and participating in the dispersal of tilapia. Further, I was able to fabricate an aquaponics system with the help of my fellow interns and got to try the different postharvest processing techniques like fish deboning, fish bottling, and fish smoking.

These experiences really made me appreciate all the efforts that our government along with its workers are doing for a sustainable fisheries management to contribute to the nation's food security. Amid this pandemic, their operations and work never stopped in order to deliver and help in the attainment of the bureau's targets.

I also appreciate the management of BFAR 3 because during our

work immersion even amid this pandemic, they had been really considerate and helpful. Our work immersion was not hampered because of the great handling of schedules and transportation system of the bureau. They willingly and happily gave assistance to whatever our needs were.

To sum up all my experiences, I could say that this was a journey worth taking. I did not know that the fisheries sector could be this much fun. Working in the stations, I could say that agriculture really felt like paradise because of the fun memories I shared with my fellow interns, the scenic views we have been to, and the abundant food that we got to enjoy and never got tired of, especially the *Oreochromis Niloticus* which we also know as Nile Tilapia.

But deeper into this paradise-like experience, I got to see and feel the same hardship and pain that every farmer endures to provide for their family especially in this time of pandemic. Farmers indeed have the hardest job.

As this journey came to an end, although it is a bit sad and lonely that I left the wonderful place and now separated from my fellow interns turned family, I will forever be grateful. I believe that these experiences and knowledge I gained from the MAYA program will open big and great opportunities for me especially in the field of agriculture and fisheries. Thank you so much Department of Agriculture and BFAR Region 3 for this experience and privilege. ■

Magiging MAYAman dahil sa MAYA program

by Datu Hamsur J. Zaid

“Create an opportunity after this graduation. Find these opportunities across segments of the value chain system that you have learned in the months of internship here in [Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, and Agrarian Reform (MAFAR)].”

This was part of the challenges in the message of Minister Dr. Mohammad S. Yacob during the graduation ceremony of the Mentoring and Attracting Youth in

Agribusiness (MAYA) Interns in the ministry on 6 July 2021.

Sixteen MAYA interns were successfully admitted in the MAFAR- in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) of which seven were agriculture graduates.

These interns were deployed to the different divisions and sections in the ministry. After the successful admission in the program, they

electd their set of officers and heads of various committees. The secretariat of their organization managed their social media page (Mentoring and Attracting Youth in Agribusiness–BARMM), prepared communication letters, and disseminated information about the upcoming lecture activities and others. The logistics committee coordinated with the ministry on the necessary preparations prior to the conduct of their activities.



To gain further knowledge on the various aspects of agriculture, fisheries, and agrarian reform, they were given lecture and presentations. These included production and management systems of rice, corn, vegetables, banana, coffee, and other industrials crops, goat, free-range native chicken, catfish; as well as lectures on *bangus* and tilapia processing and demonstration. Lectures on soil science and overview of paraveterinary training were also given.

The Food Security and Nutrition Roadmap of the region, State of Bangsamoro Agriculture; National Organic Agriculture Program, and Philippine Organic Agriculture Act of 2010 Implementing Rules and Regulations were also introduced to the interns. Further to these were lectures on the agri-fishery

credit programs, management and appreciation of farmers' cooperative and associations, agribusiness and marketing, business along the value chain including preparation of business plan.

During their stint as interns, they were involved in the MAFAR Local Exchange and Network of Goods in any Kind of Emergency activities or MAFARLENGKE—the banner development program of the ministry on market information and market facilitation of agricultural produce and fish catch. They had hands-on experience on managing small business through the Kopehan sa MAFARLENGKE Project during the Holy Month of Ramadhan.

Other interns were involved in the issuance of the food lane

passes. This is for the truckers and FFCAs experiencing difficulties in transporting the produce during the COVID-19 pandemic. They also worked on the fisherfolk registration and distribution of fisheries program intervention like fingerlings and fish stalls.

Interns were also involved in the agrarian reform communities' programs, activities, and projects. They also assisted in the preparation of detailed engineering designs and program of works, and monitored and accompanied in the validation of farm-to-market roads and on the construction of buying station and fisheries landing centers. They also assisted in the monitoring projects under the Bangon Marawi Project. They were involved in the conduct of regular and sectoral consultation meetings, promotion of advocacy, and



“Create an opportunity after this graduation. Find these opportunities across segments of the value chain system that you have learned in the months of internship here in MAFAR.”

monitoring the programs, activities, and projects of the ministry. They also learned the administrative, finance, and frontline services processes of the ministry.

They were also involved in the distribution of farm inputs under the Ahon Lahat Pagkaing Sapat Kontra COVID-19 (ALPAS) and Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund projects and activities.

To complete the experience, they learned the importance of integrated farming during the expository tours at farms, and production areas for mushroom, oil palm, tilapia and halal chicken all located in Buluan, Maguindanao.

During the testimonies in their graduation ceremony, they shared that they will engage in agriculture or any agribusiness activities.

“Sana maging mayaman tayo balang araw. Huwag nating kalimutan ang MAYA program na naging bahagi nito. We must be thankful to MAFAR and DA-[Bureau of Agricultural Research] for this opportunity,” shared MAYA intern Joahnnie Jane D. Sapan.

The ministry replicated this MAYA program and renamed it as Mentoring and Attracting Professional Youth in Agribusiness (MAPYA) program that was proposed in the Bangsamoro Government. It also adopted the same guidelines and procedures, targeting 40 MAPYA interns and providing technical assistance on crafting micro agribusiness plans. The ministry will replicate the procedures made in the MAYA interns.

The program had a great impact on the personal development and professional growth of the MAYA interns. Sapan was included in the top 20 finalists for her micro-agribusiness plan. In fact, she was hired by the ministry as contract of service personnel under the Engineering Division. Juhaimah A. Saruang, on the other hand, was awarded as the best MAYA intern. ■



Mentoring through DA MAYA Program: NFRDI's Role on Youth Empowerment

by Stephen Karol S. Riñon and Lea Mae S. Dela Cruz



With the public announcement for the Mentoring and Attracting Youth in Agriculture (MAYA) Program of the Department of Agriculture (DA), the National Fisheries Research and Development Institute (NFRDI), one of the handling offices, screened and interviewed more than 800 applicants.

The institute's MAYA Project Management Team (PMT) led by Francisco SB. Torres, Jr. and with the guidance of DA-NFRDI acting executive director Dr. Lilian C. Garcia, re-opened the MAYA application

platform thus accepting enough B.S. Fishery graduates.

Two hundred seventy-seven applicants were then successfully accepted as MAYA interns. Three of them were deployed to Freshwater Fisheries Research & Development Center (FFRDC) in Butong, Taal, Batangas for the entrepreneurship track while 274 were deployed to the National Stock Assessment Program–Project Management Office (NSAP-PMO) and in 14 regional NSAP offices of BFAR for the employment track. Most of the

accepted interns graduated with degree in BS Fisheries while the rest have degrees in agriculture, animal science, industrial engineering, and computer science.

Interns were oriented on the MAYA program, then separately oriented based on their internship track. Those assigned to the employment track were trained specifically on Boat and Gear Inventory (BGI) while those in the entrepreneurship track were taught more on the institute's developed aquaculture technologies.

The NSAP-PMO and regional NSAP offices through their project leaders were tasked to manage the interns. Under the employment track, related trainings and workshops consisting of data gathering activities such as the collection of data for the BGI, proper inventory of fishing boats, identification of fishing gears including documentation and other relevant forms were provided prior to deployment to their respective place of assignment in coastal areas. Moreover, an intern was assigned in NFRDI to perform administrative tasks such as collating and processing BGI data and assisting in data analysis and preparing the National Boat and Gear Inventory report, among others.

Dr. Ma. Theresa M. Mutia, FFRDC center chief, managed three interns under the entrepreneurship track. They were trained on basic farm protocols (pond preparation, feeding management, water management, cleaning of aquaria/tanks); culture of natural food, fish health; biology of fishes with emphasis on reproductive biology; FFRDC Maliputo Development Program breeding and culture of ornamental fishes; and Taal Lake Research and Development Program (data collection and filling out of forms).

Afterward, the interns performed fieldwork such as data gathering, assisting in farm activities such as in fish culture and upkeeping of the center, and performing other administrative and laboratory activities, as well as in preparing the post-immersion project plan for entrepreneurs (product costing, feasibility study, marketing, and business plan), workshop on project development and presentation skills, and program/project reports preparation.

They were also exposed to potential fisherfolk cooperatives and associations tapped by FFRDC as partner collaborators and in the different units of the handling office as part of their immersion activities.





The internship provided them experiences and learnings on aquaculture of major commodities in the region such as tilapia and conservation practices of the endemic fish species such as *biya*, *ayungin*, *tawilis*, and *maliputo*.

Through the MAYA program, the interns under the employment track served as additional workforce strategically assigned in their locality, contributed significant output, and fast-tracked the much-needed data for National BGI which was affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Moreover, interns under the entrepreneurship track were housed in the center thereby serving as substitutes for farm workers and research assistants. They were able to monitor culture ponds, feed ornamental fishes, perform administrative works, and assist in laboratory activities.

During the virtual MAYA awards, graduation, and recognition program, seven of the NFRDI's MAYA interns were recognized. Nehemiah Joseph Manalo and Camille Barbacina were awarded best MAYA interns while Lea Ann Jungoy, Geraldine Dionard, Ianne Nicole Lobos, Jazel Astronomo, and Armena Gani Aldaya were among the winner of best in photo journey.

Despite the limitations and effects brought by the COVID-19 pandemic, NFRDI has provided the necessary assistance needed by the interns to implement the program. These challenges brought learnings to NFRDI as a handling office in resolving issues and concerns, dealing with unexpected situations, and most importantly, serving as a beacon of hope for the youth for the betterment of the agriculture and fisheries sector. ■

“To mentor the fresh graduates and allow them to have a better appreciation of the world of rubber industry by immersing themselves in its varied aspects.” Dr. Dennis H. Palabrica, Department of Agriculture-Philippine Rubber Research Institute (DA-PRRI) acting executive director, said when asked on their personal satisfaction as a handling office.

Serving as one of the handling offices for the DA’s Mentoring and Attracting Youth in Agriculture (MAYA) Program, DA-PRRI received three interns who opted to experience the employment and entrepreneurial track of the MAYA program.

Jessilyn Alfuentes, Florisa Gumolon, and Gerlyn Tomacbas were among the screened applicants. Aged 23-25 years old, two of them are graduates of Bachelor of Science in Agricultural Technology and of Bachelor of Science in Business Administration.

The said qualified interns joined the virtual ceremonial awarding of internship certificate with Agriculture Secretary William Dar and DA-Bureau of Agricultural Research director Dr. Vivencio R. Mamaril on 10 March 2021.

They officially started their internship program on 16 March 2021 after undergoing interview, submitting the necessary documents, and accomplishing pre-implementation intern survey.

On the first day of their duty, they were oriented with the RA 10089 or the Philippine Rubber Research Act of 2010, programs

and research studies of the office. The organizational structures and COVID-19 protocols were also explained to the interns.

They were introduced to the division chiefs of the office who mentored them for the period of the internship program. The guidelines of the MAYA program were also presented to them. Since, all of them wanted to experience the entrepreneurial and employment tracks, the syllabus was arranged in such a way that it will cover both.

On their first week of duty, there was a leveling of expectations and lecture on the crafting of business proposal. At the end of the internship program, they were expected to submit a business plan for the contest dubbed as “Success begins at 40K.”

Series of lectures and field visits in relation to the Good Agricultural Practices of Rubber were provided. The interns were exposed to rubber budwood garden, nursery, and laboratory. They also experienced hands-on training in the performance of budding and tapping/latex harvesting; and witnessed the actual processing of rubber in several processing centers in Zamboanga Sibugay.

Interns also visited a trading post wherein actual selling or bidding of rubber cuplumps were done. During the last two months of the internship program, they were deployed at the Philippine Pioneer Rubber Products Corporation in Naga, Zamboanga Sibugay. They were exposed in actual rubber farmer’s daily routines; such as,

budding and tapping and working along with rubber associations and cooperatives.

The whole program served as an avenue for the MAYA interns to enhance their agribusiness skills and hone their personal professional development. Farm exposures, immersion in the rubber community, and interaction with PRRI employees were just some of the memorable experiences they can bring with them. The technical knowledge they have gained during the program was a sure advantage.

“Moreover, such an experience would propel them towards exploring new dimension of professional career development, and its goal would be self-mastery,” director Palabrica said.

The fostered bond among co-interns, peer acceptance, and spirit of belongingness honed their emotional and mental faculties, making them psychologically capacitated and healthy individuals.

Immersed in the eccentric culture at DA-PRRI, which fosters a family-like atmosphere, encourages hardwork and dedication and deepens personal growth and spirituality.

Two of the interns received an award, Best Business Plan and Best Maya Photo Journey. During the closing ceremony, the interns were awarded with certificates and cash prizes. The PRRPC were also recognized for the support to the MAYA Program. ■

3 young women completed the MAYA Internship Program in PRRI

by Girlie R. Saludo



“ To mentor the fresh graduates and allow them to have a better appreciation of the world of rubber industry by immersing themselves in its varied aspects.



“
The Filipino youth is a key driver to ensure the attainment of a food-secure and resilient Philippine agriculture, leading to a better performing economy, today and in succeeding years.

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