

From rugged terrains to tourist destination: SCOPSA's key role in Nagtipunan transformation

Farmers in a remote town in Nagtipunan, Quirino are beside themselves after they have finally achieved what was initially an impossible dream. With commitment and effort from the local government and agriculture sector, they were able to turn the tables around on a deteriorating upland suffering from soil erosion to transform their area into a flourishing terrain worthy of being called a tourist destination.

The experience of the Municipal Agricultural and Fishery Council (MAFC) of Nagtipunan is definitely one for the books. When the group first started out at the height of technological and farming developments, farmers were both benefitting and suffering from the unregulated use of non-selective herbicide (glyphosate). While there was an increase in the yield of corn products, it was discovered that the practice was eroding the soil and gullies were developing because of the heavy rains. This did not bode well for farmers in the long run.

Instead of ignoring the problem, the leadership of the MAFC thought ahead and brought the problem to the regional and regional level on the need to regulate the use of glyphosate in the upland areas with 18 degrees slope. Not only was this proposal adopted, the municipality also became the first to institutionalize Sustainable Corn Production in Sloping Areas (SCOPSA) via SB Resolution No. 272 series of 2017, a much more sustainable alternative to the common practice.

The SCOPSA in Nagtipunan benefitted from the support of the government and NGOs. From the funds extended by the local government for the production of seedlings for hedgerows such as cacao, betel nut and pineapple slips, to the development of SCOPSA Technology Demonstration farms funded by the Department of Agriculture, Philippine Red Cross, Bureau of Soils and Water Management and Department of Agrarian Reform, to training funds allotted by the Agricultural Training Institute for capacity building of farmer stakeholders, and its partnership with the academe, the program had a pretty strong foundation.

The Quirino State University was the very first to establish Technology Demonstration Farm (SALT concept) in Nagtipunan in 2010 in partnership with the Syngenta Seed Company. They conducted a series of trainings and farmers briefing on Sloping Agricultural Land Technology. The Municipal Agriculture Office engaged in a partnership with the Nagtipunan High School and the SCALA Integrated School wherein the SCOPSA

technology was integrated in the Agriculture subject for Senior High School.

It also benefitted from the expertise of CropLife Philippines, a group whose advocacy is hinged on championing the role of agricultural innovations in crop protection and plant biotechnology to support and advance sustainable agriculture.

“As one of the early partners of this project, CropLife Philippines is particularly proud of the achievements of Nagtipunan, which we consider one of our model sites for SCOPSA. They are the very epitome of a proactive community that cares about the sustainability of their livelihood and not just the short term gains of practices that are harmful to their farmlands,” CLP Executive Director Edilberto de Luna said.

It can be recalled that CropLife Philippines was the first to establish a TD for SCOPSA in San Dionisio II, Nagtipunan, Quirino. With their advocacy on SCOPSA, they worked hand in hand with the Municipal Agricultural and Fishery Council and the Municipal Agriculture Office for technology promotion through information and education campaigns (IEC), farmers trainings on Insect Resistance Management (IRM), Pesticide Resistance Management (PRM) and judicious use of herbicides. In support of the SCOPSA, the group also allocated 200 bags corn seed to be planted along the national highway which were given free to farmer adopters of SCOPSA technology.

According to the latest report of the MAPC, the implementation of SCOPSA opened new hope for our corn farmers to start a new beginning. By adopting the technologies of SCOPSA, the soil they were tilling were protected from run-off and erosion. The gullies stabilized. The use of glyphosate was minimized.

“In partnership with the CropLife Philippines, we are continuously conducting technical briefings and seminars on Good Agricultural Practices to include judicious use of herbicides and pesticides as well as proper waste disposal (chemical waste) and farm waste. The no burning policy was strictly imposed by the Municipal Environment and Natural Resources Office so farm waste are piled up in the contours or hedgerows. Run-offs were minimized and soil fertility maintained since the top soil which carries the soil nutrients are being maintained and eventually contributes to the increase of yield and income of the corn farmers. With these scenario, more farmers are embracing the project not because of what they will received as incentive but they are doing these to preserve the environment for the next generation to come,” Hedio Marquez, vice chair of the MAPC, said.

Now, their success story has inspired them to pursue a new goal – tourism – as the now green terrains teeming with bountiful crops has started to become a draw for both locals and foreigners. With the teamwork and determination of all the parties involved, it's a viable dream for the people of Nagtipunan to become the agrotourism capital of Quirino. It won't be surprising if it happens in the very near future.