

Successful OPSI Seminar in Pensumil



Dr. Dina Padilla-Fernandez discusses the current situation of the Philippine sugar industry as the participants listen intently.

The Extension team of Dr. Dina Padilla-Fernandez, Adel Catuira, Evelyn Estanislao, Joel Ronario, Rogelio Genzola, Zyryus Oliver Montiel and Joseph Peter Gonzales recently staged a successful OPSI (Outreach Program for the Sugar Industry) seminar for the Pensumil District on June 25-27, 2013 held at the Casa Ofelia Resort in Siembre, Bombon, Camarines Sur. Participants were block farm members of BISUCOPA.

Mr. Edgar Madrid (Director, DA-RFU V Regional Technical Division) officially welcomed the participants and stressed that block farms give small farmers the opportunity to make their productivity higher while reducing farming cost.

According to Mr. Madrid, if block farming fails, then the implementing agency also fails in its mandate. But if it succeeds, it only means that the farmers showed deep cooperation. As his closing statement, he reminded the participants that what's important is for them to identify their needs and leave the funding search to the DA, SRA and Pensumil.

First to take the floor was Mr. Rahman Dunton (Sugar Production Regulation Officer, Pensumil District) who discussed about "Sugar Production and Regulation." He explained how the system flows. His presentation was engaging as many of the participants made queries and clarifications during the open forum.

Shedding light on “The Sugarcane Convergence Program Rationale: Block Farming” was Ms. Gracia Sales (OIC, Chief Beneficiaries Development Coordination Division-Cam Sur B). She reviewed the respective roles of DAR, SRA and the MDDC in the whole program chain as she tackled DAR’s intervention package on the block farm project.

Meanwhile, Dr. Dina Padilla-Fernandez (Chief Agriculturist, Luzon and Mindanao) presented “The Philippine Sugar Industry Situationer.” She talked about the economics of size and the problems besetting the local sugarcane industry at present like money and the low price of sugar. Given these hurdles, she averred that block farming is one effective way to combat the probable scenario in 2015 when sugar tariff gets lower that could have drastic effects in the industry.

Among the strategies she cited to survive the impending challenge, Dr. Fernandez zeroed in on two which are doable on the part of the farmers. These are: improve farm productivity and develop other products from sugarcane.

The next speaker, Rogelio Genzola discussed about “Sugar Processing and Factory Operations” which served as an eye-opener for the participants. They learned a lot of things about how things go when sugar gets processed.

The following day’s series of presentations concentrated on the sugarcane plant. Adel Catuira, before taking center stage to discuss “The Sugarcane Plant’s Parts and Functions”, “Yield Components” and “High-Yielding Varieties/Variety Selection”, gave a knowledge leveling exercise to the participants. This was to determine the areas where the participants are weak at so that the lecturers could adjust and concentrate on said spots.

Zyrus Oliver Montiel and Evelyn Estanislao touched on related subjects. The former presented “Soil Requirements of the Sugarcane Plant” while the latter, “Nutritional Requirements of the Sugarcane Plant.” Both proved to be engaging lecturers as the participants enjoyed their light and easy-to-follow approach.

Pensumil MDO Salvador Ocampo’s presentation “Pests and Diseases of Sugarcane in the Pensumil District” as well Tess Caballero’s “Harvesting and Ratoon Management” were well-recieved by the audience since the two resource speakers spoke in their native dialect.

The final day kicked off with the lecture given by 2004 Gawad Saka winner Raul Carreras on the “Cultural Management of Sugarcane” where he shared his success formula.

According to Eng’r Carreras, land preparation is an essential factor with the use of modern implements like disc plow and sub-soiler. He suggested that this phase should be given sufficient time to achieve positive results.

When it comes to the tilling-up stage, he stated that it ought to be personally supervised by the farmer/owner and must not be left totally to the workers. The amiable resource person also stressed the importance of not wasting fertilizer, that it should be put in proper use.

Weed control is another factor. According to Mr. Carreras, if the farmer is paying something like Php 8,000 per hectare, that's too much already. He also stressed that proper use of insecticides should be learned although he said that as per his experience, getting back to the traditional and conservative ways (which includes not using too much insecticides) is effective. Interestingly, when asked as to what is the best sugarcane variety, the respected Gawad Saka Awards recipient cited 1601 and VMC 84524.

After Mr. Carreras' engaging talk, Adel Catuira took center stage again and presented his next topic: "Agro-Climatic Factors Affecting Sugarcane Production." He also discussed about the Crop Calendar system. Mr. Catuira said that weather really plays a major role in sugarcane production especially in Bicol where outpours can be so heavy the whole year. He said that Bicol farmers are not really on the backseat as compared to their counterparts in the more productive districts like Batangas. Knowledge-wise, they also have it but the weather conditions affect their production a lot.

The last speaker was Joel Ronario whose topic was a fitting ending to the three-day seminar: "Key Checks and Recommendations." This included proper land preparation, seed selection, proper and timely fertilization application, timely weed control management, proper harvesting and ratoon management.

The awarding of certificates capped the day's activity which was led by Dr. Fernandez. Joseph Peter Gonzales acted as facilitator in the three-day affair.

