

SRA Extension Team Attends Block Farm Training Workshop

The Extension team of Luzon and Mindanao attended a national orientation and action planning training workshop for block farms hosted by SRA-Bacolod on September 16-18, 2015. Held at the agency's Training Center, the three-day event proved to be a successful one as all Extension units merged forces.

The Luzon and Mindanao contingent was in full force. Leading the pack was Chief Agriculturist Dr.

Dina Padilla-Fernandez together with Ms. Evelyn Estanislao (Senior Science Research Specialist), Mr. Joseph Peter Gonzales (Training Specialist II), Mr. Allan Buque (Agriculturist II), Mr. Arthur Saludes (Agriculturist II) and Mill District Officers Mr. Joel Ronario (Tarlac), Mr. Lucio Santiago III (Balayan), Mr. Celso Ersando (Don Pedro), Mr. Lito Caranguian (Carsumco), Mr. Salavador Ocampo (Pensumil), Mr. Ireneo Nuñez (Cotabato), Mr. Edgar Aclao (Davao) and Mr. Wilfredo Mapano (Bukidnon).



Luzon and Mindanao Agriculturists with Board Member Pablito Sandoval



Atty. Johana Jadoc (National Focal Person for Block Farms) warmly welcomed all participants before the program officially started. Day One kicked-off with the lecture of Board Member Atty. Jesus Barrera regarding the salient features of RA 10659 (SIDA) and IRR.

Some of the important points raised were: a) If the DAR-SRA Block Farm could be accredited as a BF under SIDA to which Atty. Barrera answered--- Yes, but guidelines should be developed since interventions have already been given to SRA BF's; b) Legal identity of BF's, if it would be recognized under BRW (DOLE).

According to Atty. Barrera, it is possible, as long as formal financial institutions will recognize the same; c) Promotion of

commercial management style with regards to profit-sharing.

To this, Atty. Barrera averred that guidelines are still being established; and d) SRA should be careful in identifying or selecting its BF program beneficiaries especially if they're privately-owned farms. In short, it's imperative to know the farmers.



The next speaker to take the floor was Atty. Johana Jadoc who tackled the Block Farm Program---the qualifications, procedures, MOA presentation, action plan, issues and policy concerns. Among the main points raised during the discussion were: a) the dispute on the distinct role between a Farm Manager and a Technical Officer. It was cleared that the Farm Manager will become the Block Farm Field Officer while the Technical Officer will be trained as future Farm Manager; b) reporting of DAR-Technical Officer to the mill district office for instructions with regards to PPA's of block farming and for quick and accurate monitoring of

the same; c) agreement on the monitoring of DAR-SRA Block Farms. Templates were presented and analyzed so that evaluation would be easier especially for purposes of presentation to the Board. It was agreed upon that the submission of report would be on the 15th and 30th of the month; and d) SRA's Block Farm Project in the amount of Php 324 M. After the presentation, various views were expressed, arriving to the agreement that the project needs to be changed for it to have more meaningful or remarkable impact when it comes to the productivity of the beneficiaries. In the course of the discussion, various Extension recommendations/observations were made such as: a) only a few farm machineries and equipment are needed for common service providers in the district for clustered BF's, hence, there's no need to allocate said machineries to these BF's and there's also the inclusion of hauling trucks; b) as much as possible, include all SRA-initiated Block farms under SIDA for 2016 since they are expecting for such eventuality, hence, the proposed budget should be re-aligned or else, organization of future BF's will become difficult; c) provision of farm inputs especially fertilizer and cane points as well as production of bio-organic fertilizer; d) reduction of the number of trainings to be staged, which should be based on the TNA (Trainings Needs Assessment); and d) irrigation should be based primarily on the area's water source.

The next day witnessed the arrival of Adm. Ma. Regina Bautista-Martin and Board Member Pablito Sandoval. Each gave inspiring messages to the body. The latter was the first to extend his thought: "Always aim to be the best. Planters, especially the new ones do not really know the business. We're here to guide them. Let's think of our mission in life---how to make a difference in the plight of small farmers. It will be our legacy. You will be remembered for your good deed: that you were able to uplift their lives. I'm calling for a unity thumbs up!" says Board Member Sandoval.

Meanwhile, Adm. Martin cited: "You have to work continuously! If you see that something is wrong or lacking, correct it immediately. Everything is fast-track. Tell those who ask for FMR (Farm-to-Mill-Roads) that we have guidelines to observe. While the private sector is our partner, still, you have to be on top of your mill district. Work with key people who can assist you. Control and understand your mill district. Engage with the farmers. The faster we get common service providers, the better. Just get a common one. Always bear in mind that you are the expert in

delivering technology transfer. The ultimate goal is to increase farmers' income!"



Visayas' Agriculturists busy participating in the workshop proper.

The main activity for the day was for the Luzon, Mindanao and Visayas Extension personnel to put their heads together in the unification of the module of orientation of BF members where issues and concerns were pin-pointed, like: *resistance of land owner/ARBO, effects of AFTA, lack of machineries/equipment, lack of start-up capital, no community development officers, marginal areas, values of farmers, peace and order, incompetence of manager (lack of managerial skills), resistance of MDDC/PA to support BF, tax, dole-out mentality/trust on government projects, policies and personal interests of the beneficiaries..* ---**By Joseph Peter R. Gonzales**