

**Valuing commercial crops towards an innovative agri-tourism development**

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Philippine tourism development today has taken a major leap forward by incorporating agricultural and environmental activities into its programs that encourage active involvement and participation of people and their communities. Specifically, these are the agri-tourism and eco-tourism endeavors of institutions, organizations, local government units, or even individuals who use technologies generated and developed out of agricultural research and development (R&D) and protection and conservation practices on the environment as a profitable activities for tourists, including its aesthetic valuation.



In the Department of Agriculture (DA), agri-tourism is a welcome initiative that opened doors for development. Although this has been going on for several years, R&D breakthroughs are the key factors that made the fusion of these two broad areas to jointly address social and economic development. agri-tourism integrates the gains of research and development, particularly the innovative and modern technologies that produce quality products. These technologies vary from protective and precision agriculture, organic agriculture, food processing and development, agricultural information and communications management, and even biotechnology.

Furthermore, agri-tourism sets the inclusion of community activities to show the beauty of agricultural landscape which attracts educational tours for students, local government officials and even researchers with interest in these developments. This is the reason why innovative Agri-tourism is now the by-word for researchers and development practitioners who realized that there are still rppm for improvement and enhance this new field of study especially incorporating the important role of high-value commercial crops.

### **The agri-tourism activities**

Over the years, Philippine Agri-tourism has changed in perspective and directions. Before, local areas simply provided a picturesque depiction of things to be expected and what could be offered in terms of the agricultural produce in the locality. They sell and promote these for monetary gains.

Nowadays, a major shift and upgrades were done by incorporating interactive activities wherein tourists could be part of the agricultural activities while appreciating the value of the produce. How is this done?



Most of the country's agricultural production areas now integrate production management activities with tourism activities. Notable Agri-tourism activities in the country which highlights high-value commercial crops include Baguio's Panagbenga - Flower Festival held every February, La Trinidad's Strawberry Festival in March, Benguet's Adivay Festival which highlights vegetables and rootcrops in November, Kidapawan City's Durian Festival in August, Guimaras Mango Festival in April, and Camiguin's Lanzones Festival in October. All of these sites and other tourist destinations made sure that the latest and innovative agricultural technologies are integrated in their tourism programs and interactive activities of communities as part of the tourist itinerary.

### **Advocate implementer**

The interactive Agri-tourism activity initially started in the municipality of La Trinidad, Benguet over two decades ago. However, there was no formal documentation and descriptions during those times but the local people and communities already were into its practice and activities. This is normally observed during the summer season when local farmers encourage tourists to be involved in vegetable harvesting, strawberry picking, and even ubi processing, to name a few. The main goal of the activity is to encourage tourists to experience actual agricultural activities while appreciating the value of the farmers' produce. At the same time, it encourages interaction between the farmers and tourists, especially on the commodity production management system as a vehicle for information sharing and technology transfer.



Furthermore, these activities expanded to other agricultural commodities which have high commercial value such as cutflowers and ornamental plants, local winery activities, and even weaving activities. All of these became part of the emerging trends in local agri-tourism activities. Because of these, the La Trinidad local government, in collaboration with the Benguet State University (BSU), decided to add more activities for tourists to participate, experience, and be part of the interactive tourism activities. Added activities now include horse back riding, mountain climbing in the valley, coffee bean harvesting, and observational-educational tours on organic agriculture, silkworm production, and even vegetable and food processing.

But what have these got to do with the valuation of commercial crops and local tourism activity? Well, these activities changed the manner of people's interaction with tourists and the establishment of relationships in production, processing, and marketing activities between farmers, traders, researchers, and tourists. On the whole, this changed the outlook of people and usage of tourism activities to influence the agricultural landscape of the municipality of La Trinidad and BSU. An interesting observation worth sharing is the locals or the community's response to the needs of the tourists. Evidently, there was an avenue for cultural sharing on people's integrity and identity while promoting agricultural products for increased production and profit.

Explanations on the different processes of agricultural production and food processing management became a must for interaction and learning experience. Crops, particularly vegetables such as cabbage, broccoli, capsicum, tomatoes and cucumber, rootcrops such as potato, sweet potato, and yacon, and strawberry were more appreciated and given importance as to quality and aesthetic value including cutflowers and ornamentals which were the subject of beauty and landscape aficionados. To top all this, no single agricultural activity in the area only focuses on the crops but considered the transformation of their community as a tourist destination for more responsive and innovative venture.

### **What lies ahead?**

Making sense on the importance of Agri-tourism in the country is now the emerging trend in community development. The Department of Agriculture, provincial and municipal local government units, and state universities and colleges, including specific communities, jointly collaborate and develop tourism activities that highlight not only agricultural products but also the way of life of people. This new direction in agricultural and tourism development makes it a business activity. With this activity, the assurance of communities to be involved in agricultural activities will not only be treated for people's empowerment only but support the comprehensive development program including tourism initiatives as a whole.

Ref.: [http://www.bar.gov.ph/bardigest/2008/aprjun08\\_agri\\_tourism.asp](http://www.bar.gov.ph/bardigest/2008/aprjun08_agri_tourism.asp)