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WOMEN IN AGUSAN DEL SUR TURN TO VEGETABLE FARMING TO MEET FAMILY NEEDS



PHILIPPINE COLD CHAIN PROJECT

Improving Lives and Livelihoods Worldwide



Julie Pelayo at her farm in Esperanza, Agusan del Sur

Everyday at the crack of dawn, Julie Pelayo, 38, joins her husband take the short walk to a small backyard garden they've been renting to grow watermelon and bell pepper crops in Esperanza, Agusan del Sur near the eastern tip of Mindanao.

A mother of five, Julie used to stay at home to take care of the children while managing a small food stall that she was able to put up using high-interest credit capital from an enterprising neighbour. When she was prodded to attend in her husband's stead to the Farmer Field School (FFS) together with other members of the Crossing Luna Beawan Esperanza Vegetable Product Multi-purpose Cooperative (CROBEVMPC), she closed her food stall and decided to engage in farming full-time.

Since it started implementing the Philippine Cold Chain Project in the CARAGA region in 2013, Winrock has been undertaking trainings for farmers through the Farmers Field School (FFS) facilitated by East West Seeds. East West Seeds is the key horticulture partner of PCCP. They provide a 16-training module following the FFS format popularized by the Department of Agriculture.

Before participating in PCCP's FFS, Julie had been wary about meet-

ing the daily needs of her family, especially for her children's daily school allowance. She augmented their income, she resorted to selling cooked food in front of their house, but business had been slow.

In July 2014, Julie's husband was invited to become one of the selected participants to the FFS, but there were times when he could not attend, so it was Julie who took his place.

"I am so thankful to PCCP and East-West Seeds that I was able to join FFS. My lifestyle was changed. Before, I used to wake up at 8:00AM and now, I go to the farm early at 4:00AM together with my husband and I enjoy taking care of my crops," Julie said.

Julie maintains her 500 square meter demo farm in partnership with her friend Floriza Sarsua. During their first gardening effort, they planted it with bell pepper and watermelon.

In just few months, Julie was able to enjoy a weekly harvest of bell pepper with a net income of P2,000.00 and another P5,000.00 from water melon.

In December 2014, just before harvesting the crops, flash floods caused by heavy rains washed out their vegetable farm. But Julie and Floriza did not give up and continued working with whatever is left of the farm. Through a disaster relief grant provided by PCCP, Julie and the rest of her batch of FFS participants were able to re-establish their farm and buy new inputs.

"Before, I had no weekly income, but this time as a wife and mother, I am very happy that I am able to help my husband in providing for our family," Julie added.

Julie believes that what she learned had from FFS will also help the whole family to eat more nutritious foods, improve production and provide them with a better income.

Julie was not able to hold her tears back when she was expressing her joy when asked how she feels being a recipient of FFS. "Women should not be dependent on their husbands. We need to help raise the family income and start doing something for the future of our children," she said.

Julie and Floriza are now thinking of expanding their farm for a bigger production. "I would like to apply what I learned from FFS in a bigger farm and I am positive that we can earn higher income," Julie added. **(Marisol D. Tuso, MM/ Training and IEC Specialist)**

Winrock International is a nonprofit organization that works with people in the United States and around the world to empower the disadvantaged, increase economic opportunity, and sustain natural resources.



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