

SE **Business** Agenda
HD **Empowering the local coffee farming community**
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For Marinela Guerrero-Trinidad, CEO of The Cravings **Group** (TCG), having Australia's well-known specialty coffee **brand** in their restaurant chains is not just offering Filipino coffee lovers refreshing coffee choices, it is also the **company's** way of helping local farmers get more out of their produce.

TCG announced the partnership late last October, with Di Bella's owner, Australia's "Coffee King" himself Phillip Di Bella, explaining how the two companies found the "right cultural fit"-from one of Trinidad's educational trips for her employees to Melbourne where she met Di Bella's people-and started working together for more than a year to finally make the collaboration possible.

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Through the joint venture, the Di Bella Coffee line is now exclusively available in all TCG restaurant chains, including Cravings, Epicurious, Lucia Ristorante, Lombardi's, C2 Classic Cuisine, **B&P**, The Blackboard by Chef Michel, The Coffee Beanery, as well as its existing hospitality companies.

Aside from this, the partnership includes the education and training of TCG employees and, more importantly, of local farmers as well.

[caption id="attachment_205806" align="alignright" width="160"] Phillip Di Bella, founder and managing director of Di Bella Coffee[/caption]

[caption id="attachment_205809" align="alignright" width="160"] Marinela Guerrero-Trinidad, CEO of The Cravings **Group**[/caption]

Helping the industry bounce back

Jose Antonio Magtibay, TCG's chief finance officer, shares that there is a gap in demand and supply of coffee beans in the country. He cites the decades of the '70s and the '80s when the price of coffee dropped. "As a result, a lot of coffee farmers shifted their crops to other varieties [and] that dragged on," he says. Right now, Mindanao accounts for 70 percent of the 26,000 metric ton annual production in the country.

Magtibay adds that the current production of coffee beans is basically being captured by one specific **company**. It's not surprising then that the latter is also the biggest producer of coffee, he says, "primarily because they go under joint venture, they provide farmers the funding and training." As a result of this, a lot of independent coffee roasters or users have actually experienced the drop of local coffee supply. "We are actually forced to **buy** coffee at a higher price. The coffee that we have right now is coming from Vietnam," he informs.

The Philippine coffee industry stands to gain in partnering with Di Bella, says Trinidad. "Di Bella is very intent in supporting the Cravings **Group** educate and train local farmers with ethical, sustainable coffee-growing practices. By learning and adapting such renowned leadership, excellence and expertise, Filipino coffee farmers will have the opportunity to learn and eventually harvest the best-quality, locally-grown beans, which in turn gives Filipinos the best cup experience," she adds.

Finding the perfect match

TCG and Di Bella share the same story of success. Both of them started from their own backyards-the mother-daughter tandem cooking in their house with a French oven, and Di Bella roasting coffee beans in his garage. Both are staunch believers of education and sustainability, too.

Di Bella began his journey in 2002, dreaming of building a **company** that was all about the “coffee experience”. He says he envisioned a **company** that would bridge the gap between crops to cups. He points out the significance of understanding the whole process of preparing coffee from the moment the beans are planted, all the way to a cup of the caffeinated drink.

“The very notion of the Di Bella name and **brand** is understanding what farmers are doing that will affect the cup. The one constant process along the way is people. Farmers are people; coffee roasters are people; coffee shop owners are people; those who will **buy** and enjoy the coffee are people,” says Di Bella. The **company** also does something not a lot of **business** owners do-they send back their products to the farmers to let them taste the coffee, even giving them coffee makers and teaching them how to make coffee.

He adds that what makes the partnership with Cravings unique is how Trinidad's **company** understands the 'crop to cup' philosophy more than anyone else. Those familiar with TCG would know that at the core of its operations is sustainability, something that Di Bella Coffee also possesses. “Usually in the coffee market, there is a middle man. For Di Bella, he goes directly to the coffee farms; he talks to the farmers and then negotiates with them and then he is willing to pay higher than the fair trade price,” informs Emi Pascual, TCG marketing and branding consultant. They expect the same thing to happen to our Filipino coffee farmers.

Brewing the right blend

The way Filipinos enjoy their coffee are not very different from how Aussies take them-they like it sweet but strong. But Di Bella says they are open to changing how the market likes it.

“When you've got the experience, you can do anything [but] we work with the culture from our end. We don't do it our way and be arrogant. We blend with the culture,” he says. For the Philippine market, they are starting off with salted caramel, toffee, hazelnut flavors. “We understand that coffee here is more **milk**-based.”

The **company** will also bring in more changes on the production/preparation point-from espresso machines, to pressers to plungers. “We want the whole five-senses thing,” he says, referring to how TCG will present its Di Bella specialty coffee range to its customers, starting off with showing how the beans are roasted in front of the customers. More importantly, he says, they want people to “understand the traceability, this piece of art that connects you to that cup of coffee.”

Di Bella has been expanding for the past years and has stores in India, **China**, New Zealand. They just opened one in Singapore after launching in Manila. He says the Philippines is going to be “one of our best” because of the quality of partners that they have here. We're looking forward to a bright future,” he says.

TCG President Annie Guerrero wants to look at the whole partnership as going full circle. “It's a long journey and it's unfolding now. We've been in a long search for that perfect coffee experience since 1994 and I'm so happy [we've found the match],” she ends.

CO	diblc : Di Bella Coffee Company
IN	i0100137 : Coffee Growing icoffee : Coffee Products i0 : Agriculture i01001 : Farming i41 : Food/Beverages/Tobacco ibevrge : Beverages/Drinks icnp : Consumer Goods inonal : Non-alcoholic Beverages/Drinks
NS	ccat : Corporate/Industrial News cpartn : Partnerships/Collaborations c11 : Plans/Strategy
RE	phlms : Philippines austr : Australia apacz : Asia Pacific asiaz : Asia ausnz : Australia/Oceania devgcoz : Emerging Market Countries dypcoz : Developing Economies seasiaz : Southeast Asia
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