

Headline: Climate change, hydroponics

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Climate change has made the growing of food risky. This is because you cannot predict the timing or severity of its occurrence. Hydroponics is the answer to this. When there is too much water because of a sudden storm or too little water because of drought, hydroponics conducted in the safety of a greenhouse can produce the highest quality product.

Hydroponics means water (hydro) should work (ponics) for you. The following is from mix.ph.com: "Hydroponics is the method of growing plants in nutrient-enriched water instead of soil. In soil, biological decomposition breaks down organic matter into the basic nutrient salts that plants feed on. Water dissolves these salts and allows uptake by the roots."

The advantage of hydroponics is that the water used contains only the most appropriate basic nutrient salts for a given plant. This ideal combination is rarely found in soil. Also, production is contained in a small concentrated area. The water is used over and over again, with a fresh combination of nutrient salts for every production cycle.

Hydroponics is also very profitable. At a time when we are importing high value crops to satisfy stringent quality requirements, we can save dollars and provide jobs through strictly controlled hydroponics. We suggest listing all the high value crops we import and determine those we can substitute through hydroponics. Import substitution has become a bad word because it is said to imply protectionism at the expense of the consumer. However, in this case, it is beneficial to the consumer.

On June 17, Chito Sace (0906-3447226) of the Central Luzon State University (CLSU) gave a talk on hydroponics to the Agriculture Techno-Demo Forum hosted by Francis Cansino. This supplements Cansino's daily "Maunlad na Agrikultura" on Radyo ng Bayan, which was cancelled last week in favor of a news commentary. However, Cansino's service to the farmers lives on through the free Techno-Demo Forum held at 9 a.m. every 3rd Thursday of the month at the Wildlife Park Center in Quezon City. Sace was the speaker in the last forum.

Sace's background is admirable. After graduating valedictorian in both his elementary and high schools in Gasan, Marinduque, he had to beg from the richer citizens of his municipality so that he could continue his studies. He went on to get Bachelors, Masters, and Doctorate degrees from CLSU. He then proceeded to take up further studies abroad in hydroponics. With his educational background and his hands-on experience in the Middle East for six years in this area, he has been invited to lecture in countries such as China, Vietnam, Israel, Australia and the United States.

To ensure that his work would be used to help farmers, and not be limited to the academe, he spearheaded the CLSU-Israel-Department of Agriculture (DA)-Shalom Club Philippines Demonstration Farm, where hydroponics could be learned in practical terms. He documented the profits from this farm in publications such as "Economic Analysis of an Urban Vertical Garden" published in the International Journal of Contemporary Applied Sciences. A cost-return analysis of honey dew melon production using hydroponics is also widely circulated in different parts of the world.

At last Saturday's forum, Sace said he had talked to senior DA officials about the hydroponics potential in the Philippines. He said he was summarily dismissed. "The prophet is not heard in his

own country.” However, he showed the table below of how other countries have embraced hydroponics.

Despite Sace showing how hydroponics is very profitable with an average two-and-a-half year payback period, he said it had not become popular because many people who tried it did not follow the right technology and nutrient mix necessary for success. He said “If only the government or a reputable private sector group took the time to teach this properly, hydroponics can indeed be the answer not only to climate change, but also to poverty.” With little land needed, a farmer can have this added source of income and make even more money from hydroponics than from the land he tills.

Climate change is here. It is time we take advantage of hydroponics the way other countries have.

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