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In high spirits: Abnasan and her wine

Enjoying the Fruits of their Labor

Adams, Ilocos Norte – Perfecting a wine-making formula she

inherited from village elders in the Mountain Province and marketing the resulting wines have given Carmelita Abnasan a second income, on top of her salary as a municipal midwife in this town.

You could say that Abnasan has midwifed the local fruit wine industry here, sharing her know-how with other housewives in the community and giving them a profitable source of livelihood in this hinterland town in the northern Philippines, 597 kilometers from Manila.

Abnasan, 41, born to an Igorot mother in Bauko, Mountain province and an Ilocano father from Ilocos Sur, trained 63 unemployed women, most of them wives of farmers who can only find occasional work. That training in 2007 led to the creation of a local wine makers association in Adams, which gained generous support from the local government unit and several government agencies in terms of technology exchange, packaging, promotion and marketing. The agencies included the Department of Science and Technology, the Department of Trade and Industry and the Mariano Marcos State University.

Her traditional wine formula caught the delicate taste of wine lovers especially when the DOST helped packaged its branding, now popularly known as the Adams bugnay wine, available in export quality brand labels and corks.

The enhanced taste of Adams bugnay wine assures quality control. Thanks to DOST's refractometer, which was turned over to the association to measure the sugar in the bugnay juice prior to its fermentation.

Fehlander Madriaga, the Provincial Science and Technology Director of the DOST office in Batac City said they had been extending this technology assistance for stakeholders to benefit from ripe technologies, the agency is ready to transfer.

To date, the women's business enterprise has expanded to include a broad range of local fruit wines like bugnay (wild blackberries), tapuey (upland rice wine), malubeg (red berries, passion fruit, wild

cherry, star fruit, pineapple) and Rochel fruit wine. To ensure the quality of their products, the association has applied for accreditation with the Bureau of Food and Drugs.

The high demand for their products here and abroad has also prompted members of the wine-makers association to put up their own fruit tree plantations to ensure the sustainability of their business venture. At present, the association maintains about three hectares of scattered farm lots planted with fruit-bearing trees and other agricultural crops.

"But we still feel this is not enough to supply our growing market," says Abnasan, citing the high volume of orders that the association has been getting.

This pioneering wine-maker produces about 3,000 bottles of local wine a year. Each bottle is sold wholesale at a minimum of P100 per bottle with an ordinary cap and P200 for a bottle with cork. Agnasan estimates that she earns P300,000 a year, with approximately 80 percent return on investment.

Apparently, what started as a mere sideline now earns her more than her day job. But she's not about to quit that just yet. "I make wine during my spare time and I don't think it will complicate my job as a government employee," she says.

From a small capital of P10,000 when she started her wine-making business about nine years ago, Abnasan has earned enough to be able to buy idle lands in her municipality, which she is now developing into fruit tree plantations.

"We need to expand (our crop yield) because sometimes, we still have to go to nearby Pagudpud town and even to the neighboring Cagayan Province, to buy raw fruits needed in our wine-making business," she adds.

With a husband working abroad and a thriving wine business, Agnasan can afford to take things easy. But she'd rather not. This midwife also hosts a home-stay for tourists coming to Adams, and has been able to purchase home furniture and fixtures to make a comfortable home for her two children.

Like the wine business that has kept her and the other Adams women afloat, life for Abnasan can really be a heady pleasure.

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