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Ilocos S & T Trends



ENTERED AS SECOND-CLASS MAIL MATTER AT THE SAN FERNANDO CITY, LA UNION POSTAL OFFICE

Volume 6, Issue No. 12

ISSN No. 0118-0924

DECEMBER 2013

Dragon Fruit Soap Maker Bares Secret Formula



Currimao, Ilocos Norte- When opportunity knocks on you and it's for free, do not hesitate. Grab it. You may never get that chance again.

This seems to be the statement of Agnes Asuncion, 53, of Pias Norte village in Currimao town who is now a leading manufacturer of dragon cactus herbal soap in Ilocos region, bringing fortune much more than she expected.

For 21 long years, Asuncion sacrificed to be away from family when she decided to work as a domestic helper in Hongkong. That time, life in the farming village where she was born and raised could hardly sustain her college education. So, after graduating from high school, she went to Manila and found a job as a janitress at the Galang Medical Center in Sta. Cruz. While working, she enrolled as a Nursing aid student. But when an agency was in need for

domestic helpers abroad, she immediately applied and worked in Hongkong from 1982 to 2003.

Her stay in Hongkong sustained the education of her two children until she decided to go home and helped her husband grow their farmland.

But Asuncion's endless quest to try new things brought her to dragon fruit production and processing.

In 2001 or barely three years ago, the Mariano Marcos State University started its aggressive promotion of dragon fruit to be planted in every Ilocano home. Farmer scientists and technology experts converge to popularize the technology and it spread like a wildfire because of the amazing treats of dragon fruit that grows well in the province. She was one them. She started planting a few dragon fruit cuttings in their backyard and later on, they converted their rain-fed rice farm into dragon fruit plantation.

Now, Asuncion is one of MMSU's cooperators benefiting from the production, processing and marketing of dragon cactus soap.

"I was invited to attend a free skills training on dragon fruit processing by the MMSU in cooperation with the Ilocos Agriculture, Aquatic Research and Development Consortium and the OPAG-FITS Center. So, when I went home, I was so excited to apply what I learned and use my soap if it's ok with my skin," said Asuncion in Ilokano language citing she started to experiment from then on using her basic training on dragon cactus soap making.

Starting from 25 pieces of dragon cactus herbal soap which she shared to family members and neighbors, Asuncion said she was surprised that those who tried her product kept coming back to her and buy more.

"So, I decided to capitalize on it and produce more. It is not just for money but I find joy in helping customers with sensitive skin and help solve their skin allergy problems," she said.



To date, the Asuncion family's backyard in Pias Norte serves as her production site for raw materials. From 30 posts of dragon cactus plant, she has now grown into 200 posts and counting. Aside from fruits that she sells to customers during fruit season, she is personally processing the juice obtained from dragon cactus stalks as the main ingredient in her herbal soap-making business that comes with anti-aging formula and moisturizer or anti-mosquito including a mint flavor with calming effect and a mild soap for extra sensitive skin.

While doing so, the perfect timing is with her. Aside from being one of MMSU's assisted farmer-entrepreneur and processor, she is also being supported by the Department of Science and Technology through its Innovation Support System, providing financial assistance used in the design and fabrication of a dragon cactus herbal soap mixer, including the improvement of packaging materials to meet product quality standards. Aside from the assistance worth P65, 000, she is also a recipient of the Rural Enterprise Livelihood Support through the Academe (ELSA) on dragon cactus soap production and marketing worth P82,500 to cover fabrication of equipment and other materials to improve her product.

To cater to her growing market who directly buy from her shop located along the national highway or annex building of their residence in Pias Norte, Asuncion said that she is targeting to produce at least 500 pieces per week now pegged at a wholesale price ranging from P5 for each small size preferred by hotel and resort establishments and three for P100 or P85 each for regular and family sizes. Through word of mouth and participation in trade fairs, the Agnes Dragon Fruit Herbal Soap has already reached a wide market with purchase orders here and abroad.

For her, the secret formula to success is simply to take chances and work hard for it to make it happen.

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