DRAGON FRUIT: THE NEW MONEY CROP IN THE COASTAL AREAS OF NORTHWESTERN CAGAYAN

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ABSTRACT

The Philippines’ Department of Agriculture, Regional Field Office 02 (DA-RFO 02) recognizes dragon fruit as a commercial fruit crop grown in the coastal municipalities of Cagayan. There are 12 coastal municipalities that are located in Northern Cagayan. Various Techno Demo on Dragon Fruit Production were established in 2011 under the supervision of Northern Cagayan Experiment Station. The objective is to promote dragon fruit as new money crop for favorable upland areas and marginal adverse ecosystem.

Among the stakeholders who are now profiting from the business are Engineer Mauro Daquigan and his cousin, Baltazar Daquigan, a retired DENR employee. The owner of Bang-R farm is now a millionaire. Engr. Daquigan turned his six-hectare idle land into dragon fruit farm, almost one kilometer away from the seashore of Culao, Claveria, Cagayan because after tagging dragon fruit as a new money crop, he also added his Manong R beach house/resort which is a popular tourist destination in Cagayan. Bang-R Dragon Fruit farm was named after his cousin Baltazar (Bang). Bang, is his full time industrial partner while Engr. Mauro is in Manila who runs a construction firm. Their farm is in its 3-year operation earning a gross income of PhP320,000.00-500,000.00 (about US$7,000-11,000) per hectare per year. The yield ranges from 3,200 to 5,000 kg/ha; hence, it generated an income of PhP2-3 million (US$44,000-65,000) from 6 hectares of dragon fruit plantation. However, the capital invested was only realized after 2 years.

Among the cultural management developed were the fabrication of concrete post (200cm long x 13cm width), choice of variety, distance of planting, fertilization, pest and disease management, harvesting and packaging. The red (Hylocereus polyrhizus) and the white (Hylocereus undatus) flesh dragon fruit are the most popular varieties known for their health values. The spacing of 2m x 2.5m gives an appropriate population density with a higher income. Application of extensive organic fertilizer was employed to ameliorate the sandy soil in the seashore. Application of 0.5 kg of inorganic fertilizer (14-14-14) and 16 kg of organic fertilizer per post was done. Pests were controlled by insecticide and weed by one cattle per hectare. Water was critical during dry months; however, flood prone site is avoided. Over ripeness will cause fruit cracking leading to a lower price. Packaging in crates labeled with Bang R signature can reach as far as Manila and still remain fresh. The Bang R dragon fruit farm had increased the agri-entrepreneurs in Cagayan because of its good market potential and relatively short growing period. All of these led to profitability coupled with the widely available production technologies that have been developed, and dragon fruit has been experiencing wide promotions.