

Family Farm Schools

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Dateline August 8, 1988. "President Corazon C. Aquino inaugurated today the Dagatan Family Farm School in Lipa City." Since the establishment of the first Family Farm School in the Philippines (and in Asia) 23 years ago, there are now 13 such schools operating in various parts of the country, in Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao. There were of course problems and set-backs but the fact is the system has now spread and there is a need to solidify the rooting of this type of educational system in the country.

The growth of the Family Farm Schools has largely been a private sector-led and -driven initiative. Government support has been sporadic and miniscule. There is a bit of an injustice here since the Family Farm Schools provide a service to the common good and the neediest and therefore the state should be a source of support. Be that as it may, if and when government support comes, it should just be considered gravy.

The challenge now is how to make these farm schools reach out to more young people so that they are provided with the type of education that is relevant to their families and their communities.

The first Family Farm School started in France when a farmer-parent decided that children in his community need a special type of school to cater to the needs of their children.

Thus, the *Maisons Familiales Rurales* movement started. Its educational system is built on the principle of the alternate training system.

That was in order to allow one of his children to get further education after his "certificat d'études" (first diploma of the French education system at that time).

This visionary farmer, a leader of the local professional organization, was convinced that to be a successful farmer it is necessary to get more and more knowledge, theoretical and technical. He was convinced that it is important to get knowledge beyond the farming experience in order to get a global approach to be applied to problems besetting the rural areas.

Supported by the parish priest, the first group of interested parents decided to form a professional organization.

Then the year after they decided to buy a house naturally called *Maison Familiale* (family house) and they recruited a technician in order to

give the young students' training and to give advice to the parents-farmers as well.

That's how the first *Maison Familiale Rurale* was born in 1937. In 1941 the *Maisons Familiales Rurales* chose the status of Association (according to the "French 1901 law") in order to avoid inclusion into the "corporation paysanne" (a farmers trade-union) and to be able to act quite freely.

The same year they created the *Union Nationale des Maisons Familiales Rurales* (National Union for the *Maisons Familiales Rurales*).

Today, there are more than 2,500 such schools all over the world.

One significant point that we can learn from the origins of the Family Farm Schools is that it is an initiative of the local people, of parents who know what is best for their children's education. Thus, they are the promoters and the owners of the school in their own right.

The formation of the union or federation is a way for them to share experiences and in common support for the needs of the other schools. This goes without saying to represent their interests to the government if needs be.

The first family farm schools in the Philippines were established not by the locals but by some benevolent people who formed a foundation for this purpose.

Over the past few years, however, we have already seen family farm schools as a local initiative and by parents themselves. This augurs well for the expansion of the system in the whole country.

How can government help?

I have to lament to the fact that agriculture education (of the real type) has not really been given the support.

I say of the real type because agriculture education in the country has been biased towards the "production of agriculture scientists and technologists" but not agriculture entrepreneurs.

This explains partly why our agriculture sector today is largely undeveloped and a great majority of farmers are still in the subsistence level.

The bias against agriculture can also be shown in the amount of resources devoted to the establishment of science high schools by the government (national and local) purportedly to prepare scientists and technologists.

But have we heard of Family Farm Schools or agriculture high schools being developed by the government of late? In fact, it is the other way around. The few agriculture high schools that were established in the last century have now been converted to comprehensive high schools. A good number has even evolved into state colleges and universities.

Where do we go from here?

With the new administration of President Benigno C. Aquino III there is hope that agriculture be given the support it needed to make it into a dynamic sector of the economy.

If anti-poverty programs as promised by PNoy have to have its effect then it must target the farmers as priority for such interventions. Development economics literature will tell us that the great majority of developed economies today started by modernizing their agriculture. A good part of this strategy is educating the "cultivators of the land", the farmers themselves and their children. Policy makers in the Philippines over the past decades seemed not to have learned this lesson.

It is never too late to start something truly meaningful for our farmers and for their children. The government can consider the following:

1. Establish a parallel system to the science high schools that caters specifically to the needs of agriculture (including fisheries and forestry).

The Family Farm School model is one possibility. If DOST can have a system of science high schools under its wings, why can't the DA have its version of farm schools directly under its supervision and direct support?

We are not really starting from zero here because there are already 13 Family Farm and Rural Development Schools operating in the Philippines today. What they need is a little support from government to flourish.

Also, under TESDA are a number of agriculture and fishery schools. Their situation, however, under the management and supervision under TESDA put them in an incestuous situation because TESDA as regulator of training programs also manages a number of these tech-voch agriculture and fisheries schools. Why not put these schools under the DA-Agricultural Training Institute?

2. Establish post-secondary programs under TESDA that cater to the needs of the agricultural sector. TESDA has been focused too much on industry forgetting that agriculture too needs a trained manpower pool.

Here too we have working models on the ground. Graduates of the Family Farm Schools can now look forward to taking their education to a higher level. The MFI Farm Business School, in partnership with the

Management Association of the Philippines and the University of Rizal System, has implemented a Bachelor of Science in Entrepreneurial Management major in Farm Business since 2 years ago.

Twenty six of our first year students are sponsored by the Development Bank of the Philippines for their 4-year college education.

Last year, the Foundations for People Development and DA through its Agriculture Training Institute partnered to offer a 2-year ladderized program for agriculture entrepreneurship for 31 out-of-school youth that makes use of the Dual Training System. It would just take a very small percentage of the budget of TESDA and the DA to make this a nationwide program with the private sector as a partner.

Isn't this one of the calls of PNoy for a public private partnership for bringing our country towards the *tuwid na daan at paraan*?

This might just be what our farmers are waiting for all these years. What President Corazon C. Aquino started 23 years ago might just find its fulfillment in her son's watch as President of the Republic of the Philippines.

Dateline June 30, 2016. "Today marks the end of the six-year term of President Benigno C. Aquino III. One of the legacies that he will be remembered is the true emancipation of Filipino farmers from poverty.

"Now, our farmers enjoy bountiful harvests of high value crops, fisheries, livestock, and forestry products made possible largely by the implementation of a national manpower development program that trained farmers and their children to become FARM ENTREPRENEURS. This program launched in 2011 is a concrete example of success under his Public-Private Partnership that he promised during his inaugural speech in June 30, 2010."

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