

Advocate of pesticide-free agriculture

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It is always educational and rewarding to talk to people who have hands-on experience in good agricultural practices. Just like Michael Batayola of Bantayan Island in Cebu who has been growing food crops that don't have to be sprayed with chemical pesticides.



His approach is to provide the plants with balanced nutrition so that they will grow fast and healthy without the need to spray them with expensive and dangerous synthetic chemical pesticides. In his own farm in Bantayan Island in the last couple of years, his eggplant did not suffer from any damage by fruit and shoot tip borers. He has also helped many other farmers improve their farming by teaching them to feed their plants with the right nutrients for balanced nutrition.

His approach in farming is very scientific. First, he has to know the pH of the soil so he can give the right recommendation. He has with him the latest pH meter that can give him immediate information on the pH of the soil. If the soil is acidic, say 4.5 pH, he will tell the farmer not to apply chemical fertilizer in the soil because that would be useless. The plants will not be able to absorb the fertilizer applied in the soil. Instead, Mike would recommend foliar spraying of urea to provide the nutrients needed by the plants. Meanwhile, the soil should be improved with the application of biochar like carbonized rice hull or soil conditioner and pH enhancer like Green Cal which contains calcium sulphate dihydrate, calcium and sulfur.

Just like many other farmers, Michael started planting hybrid vegetable seeds from East-West and Allied Botanical the conventional way. While he got good harvests, he

had to resort to buying medicine for headaches and other ailments brought about by his use of chemical pesticides.

Then he came to know about Zetryl Chem Philippines during a trade fair in Cebu. From the Zetryl representative, he came to know about growing food crops with biostimulants which are seaweed and plant extracts that promote plant growth, higher yield, better quality harvest with longer storage life.

That's what he adopted in 2015 and discarded the use of chemical pesticides. He has been so successful in his use of biostimulants and soil conditioners that it became his advocacy to transfer the technology to other farmers. That way, the farmer could produce safe harvests for human consumption and at the same time giving them higher income.

Mike has observed that biostimulants are very effective in improving the performance of various crops. Calbit C, for instance is a biostimulant that treats or prevents calcium deficiencies. It prevents or treats apical rot/bruising, drying of leaves, tip burn and fruit rot. Boron, on the other hand, is also needed by plants, especially in producing high quality fruits with long storage life. For this, Mike uses Boro Plus to prevent or cure boron deficiencies.

There are several biostimulants developed by Valagro company from Italy which can address various farming problems. One is called Megafol that works like magic on plants that are suffering from stress. The stresses could include flooding, drought, too cold temperature, pest infestation, strong winds and weeds stealing the nutrients intended for the main crop. Megafol enhances the uptake of nutrients from the soil so plants can recover fast. When the farmer is using fungicides, insecticides and herbicide, Megafol heightens the efficacy of the said inputs.

***** DRIP-IRRIGATED DRAGON FRUIT – We visited last Tuesday the 22-hectare farm of Dragonfruit Philippines, Inc. in Brgy. Anonas, Angeles City together with Greg de los Trinos who supplied the farm with his drip irrigation system. Crisper Garcia, farm manager, was so thankful to Greg because his drip irrigation R350 is saving the farm a fortune since it was installed last January. Previously, Cris said that they had to employ more than 50 laborers just to water the 40,000 posts of dragon fruit. In one day of watering they had to spend about R20,000 for the farm workers' wages. Now, they don't have to pay that amount for watering their plants. The drip irrigation system which cost them the equivalent of one month's cost of manual watering, is estimated to be working for at least five years.