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Importance of our indigenous veggies

Traditional and indigenous food crops are less damaging to the environment, at the same time, preserving the cultural heritage of local communities

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The pandemic has led to serious global economic slowdowns and downturns, resulting in job and income losses that often lead to increased food insecurity for vulnerable groups. The unaffordability of healthy foods and declining incomes of the people could worsen the problem, making food, particularly those nutritious needed for a healthy diet, less affordable for many, especially the poor.



With this, traditional and indigenous food resources can now constitute the core of diversity in traditional and indigenous food systems of communities in the countryside.

The underutilized food resources have higher nutrient contents than generally known species or varieties commonly produced and consumed.

With uncertainty, there is an urgent need to diversify our food base to a wider range of food crop species for greater system resilience.

Furthermore, traditional and indigenous food crops are less damaging to the environment, at the same time, preserving the cultural heritage of local communities.

Among the notable interventions that could address these concerns is the project dubbed “Documentation of Indigenous

Vegetables in the Philippines,” which is an initial research effort to improve the utilization of indigenous vegetables and raise the awareness of Filipinos on its benefits.

Implemented by University of the Philippines–Los

Baños (UPLB), the project documents interspecific and intraspecific diversity, utilization, maintenance and seed supply of indigenous vegetables in the country.

It also assembles available information on indigenous vegetables from printed and electronic sources, as well as from on-the-ground community interactions in 20 provinces such as Abra, Batangas, Bohol, Bukidnon, Camarines Sur, Capiz, Davao del Sur, La Union, Leyte, Ilocos Sur, Ilocos Norte, Nueva Ecija, Nueva Vizcaya, Quezon, Siquijor, Rizal, South Cotabato, Surigao del Sur and Zamboanga del Norte.

The UPLB team has so far collected 457 indigenous vegetables belonging to 255 genera and 90 families.

The team has also compiled 956 publications on indigenous vegetables of the Philippines.

Currently, a compendium of literatures on indigenous vegetables, a book which will cover 80 indigenous vegetables across 32 different plant families with over 200 recipes, and a database of all the information about indigenous vegetables are being packaged by the research team.

The Implementing agency is the UPLB College of Agriculture and Food Science (CAFS) and Institute of Crop Science (ICropS), while the funding government agency for this project is the Philippine Council for Agriculture, Aquatic and Natural Resources Research and Development of the Department of Science and Technology (DoST-PCAARRD). Currently, the following indigenous edible plants and vegetables have been identified and studied, and the results of which are described, based on availability and areas where they are grown.

Sudi (taro and cocoyam) Sudi is an Ivatan term for dried petiole of gabi (*Colocasia esculenta*) or yautia (*Xanthosoma sagittifolium*).

This is the main ingredient for venes, an Ivatan dish cooked with coconut cream (gata), which seems to be a variant of the Bicolano dish laing.

Venes use dried petiole instead of the laing's

partially dried leaves, where it is allowed to dry while still attached to the standing plant.

Dried petioles are gathered as soon as it dries up, and then braided to facilitate storage.

Prior to cooking, the dried petioles are chopped into small pieces and soaked in water for about a day to soften it, making it to be a source of vitamin A.

Aside from venes, dried petioles can also be cooked as ginisa and adobo.

Yayud

Yayud is another Ivatan's indigenous vegetable, which was believed to have been brought by the Ivatan elders in the area during the late 1970s.

Yayud belongs to the plant family Asteraceae and grows up to four feet, and its leaves are variable in shape, depending on the stage of the plant, but typically oblong-lanceolate.

In terms of food preparation, ginisa is the most common, but this vegetable can also be cooked as adobo, salad, sabaw and asoy.

According to local residents, yayud prefers highly elevated and moist places.

Sibujing

Palapa is a unique dish of the Maranaos, according to villagers in Barangay Malinao, Kalilangan in Bukidnon.

It is greasy with an intense spicy flavor, and the main ingredient of this dish is sibujing (*Allium* sp.) together with hot chilli and sibuyas dahonan.

Together, these are pounded in a mortar and pestle. While pounding, a pinch of salt is added to easily extract the juice and to spread the flavor to all the ingredients. After pounding, everything is sautéed using coconut oil.

A large proportion of the population in Kalilangan are Maranaos according the municipal agriculturist, which explains why plenty of sibujing are sold at the Kalilangan public market.

Dapdap, Tan-ag and Hagnaya

Unique to Camarines Sur are dapdap (*Erythrina variegata*), tan-ag (*Kleinhovia hospita*) and hagnaya (*Stenochlaena palustris*).

All these three indigenous vegetables are consumed for their shoots or young leaves.

According to the local residents, only few dapdap trees remain in Sipocot due to the spread of a disease, which caused the disappearance of many dapdap trees.

This vegetable is most commonly cooked with gata.

While tan-ag leaves are likewise used as wrapping materials in the tinoktok dish, which is similar to pinangat where taro leaves are used as wrapping material.

Hagnaya, on the other hand, can either be cooked in gata or sautéed.

Dapdap and tan-ag are usually found near rivers, while hagnaya can also be seen growing in farms. These three indigenous vegetables are just gathered or foraged, not cultivated, and are also not sold in markets and are mainly for household consumption.

Pako (ferns)

Though naturally growing in the wild, pako has gained popularity as among the natural foods of communities in Nueva Vizcaya. In fact, these communities are now cultivating pako not only for home consumption, but for commercial as well, where bundles of pako are sold at the Aritao and Bayombong public markets, including neighboring municipalities.

The province is generally mountainous, varying from steep mountains to rolling hills, with some valleys and plains, where many rivers also exist. Shading and significant rainfall in the province also contributed in the unlimited supply of diverse kinds of edible ferns.

There were three types of edible ferns surveyed — pako or pakpako (*Diplazium esculentum*) which has green fronds and smaller than billangan. This is the most popular among the three, and in fact, many households in Imugan, Sta. Fe have started domesticating it.

Sarabat is another type of fern with reddish frond and of the same size as pako, which remains underutilized in some municipalities due to limited information about its edibility, but this is being sold at the Bayombong public market.

While the billangan has green fronds and the biggest among the three, and also available at the Aritao public market.

The young shoots are delicate, but because of its bigger size, it takes more cooking time compared with the other types.

Despite the morphological differences of these types of ferns, they thrive in the same environment. Dishes that can be prepared out of these types of pako include pinakbet, salad, sauteed, kilawin and dinengdeng.

The pinakbet dish with billangan is usually prepared in Maasin, municipality of Quezon.

Prior to cooking, the papery scales of billangan are removed through swishing of hands. Fern is likewise believed to cure wounds when applied as poultice.

Balagnot (fish tail palm) Balagnot is a member of the family Arecaceae, and the pith is consumed by the communities in Imugan, Santa Fe and can be prepared sauteed, inabraw, nilaga, grilled, dinengdeng and mixed with sardines.

Several trees of this palm have grown in the area and over time continuously producing seedling underneath and in its surrounding.

It was reported to be a source of good lumber, while in terms of its medicinal value, it helps lower blood pressure.

Tambabasi Tambabasi or tawasi, *Cheilocostus speciosus*, is commonly found growing along roads, near streams, in forests and sometimes at the farm where it gets enough moisture.

Only indigenous communities in Lanuza, Surigao consume this as vegetable, where the Visayan residents of the two barangays in San Miguel are still in doubt of its edibility.

Some have just overheard that this is edible but, only a few have tried to utilize it or at least only some are familiar with this indigenous vegetable.

The leaves are discarded while the stem is left for grilling. After grilling, the skin is removed, where the remaining pith is cut into short pieces and mixed with onions and fish paste.

Oftentimes, the piths are grilled but can also be cooked as nilapwahan, ginisa, ginataan, tola and salad.

It has a similar taste to eggplant, and in terms of its medicinal value, it is believed to cure cough, sore eyes, toothache, measles, fever, swollen gums and tooth problems in children. It is also believed to lower blood pressure when eaten.

ISP program

According to the DoST-PCAARRD, this is in line with the targets of its Industry Strategic S&T Program or ISP for vegetables, adding that the project will indirectly help increase the consumption of safe indigenous vegetables in the country.

The agency stressed that this program highlights the importance of mainstreaming the production and utilization of indigenous vegetables as healthy alternatives to common vegetables in every Filipino's food basket, particularly at these most trying times.