



Agripreneurship : An exciting challenge towards economic development

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Agripreneurship as an innovation for enhancing agricultural development and crafting a functional education will indeed be the game changer especially for the ASEAN economy; where the base industry is agriculture. As such, the sector has a corresponding potential for job and wealth creation. As an educational focus, agripreneurship can meaningfully address job mismatch specifically unemployment and underemployment. Dar's paper states that only 10 to 15 % of about 7,000 graduates annually are employed. Majority of the graduates are in a situation of underemployment, hence, underpaid. Bringing in the entrepreneurial paradigm in agricultural education can lead to graduates that can initiate the momentum on agripreneurship. Because agripreneurs are regarded as the new breed of businessmen, who can drive change through innovations, they can easily adapt to constant dynamics of markets and the farm enterprise. With this is the assurance of profitability, sustainability and competitiveness of the various agricultural industries such as wide-scale high value crop/livestock production juxtapose with food processing and other value-adding ventures.

As outlined by William D Dar, president of the InangLupa Movement in the Philippines, jumpstarting agripreneurship will require a change in perspective and resources. These include: mindset, mentoring, money, mastery, and machines or referred to as the six (6) Ms for agripreneurship. Mindset change is instilling the culture of entrepreneurship to all stakeholders. In the educational system including parents, this will entail having confidence in the entrepreneurship paradigm where education will have to produce graduates not to be employees but as entrepreneurs capable of creating opportunities, enterprises, jobs and wealth. The academic program for agripreneurship should allow for pedagogy beyond the confines of classrooms and application of lessons learned in real-life situations to strengthen critical thinking. The industry partners can provide said platform for experiential learning.

Fledgling agripreneurs will entail ample mentoring and even coaching. Business owners and practitioners are helpful in providing the necessary guidance/directions on different functional areas of entrepreneurship. Akin to technology business incubation (TBI), agripreneurship can focus on the youth for providing and honing the skills in business management and operation, including access to funding that not only covers credit but also possible capital infusion by partners or venture capitalists.

As emphasized by Dar, mastery brings to fore the significance of deliberate inclusion the basics of entrepreneurship from secondary level to higher education. This will serve as the building block for embracing the concept. Key areas to master should also include spotting market opportunities, product positioning and differentiation, product and market development, business plan preparation, and a system for continuous learning and innovating.

Besides the need for innovation, strengthening and creating market linkages in the entire supply and value chains, both local and export markets can stimulate the production system. When agripreneurs are able to convert raw agriculture produce into higher value-added products, referred to as agro-processing, they can compete both in the local and global markets. The aim to tap the export markets can stimulate even greater farm production and bring more income to agripreneurs and even farmers who work together with them.

Resources like money and machinery are as equally important since these are inputs to make one's business competitive. Money would also include skills and knowledge in financial tasks. Financial literacy is important not only in putting up schemes for financing agribusinesses but the entire process of decision-making. Towards the pursuit of agripreneurship, one must not only have the appropriate tools or equipment but must also be abreast with the latest or state of the art gears to achieve cost-efficient production and processing including packaging. Together, these ensure quality production and as mentioned earlier, to be globally competitive. In the Philippines, there is the Shared Services Facility Program (SSF) where start-ups can avail of the facilities to level up their production and value adding.

Indeed, agripreneurship will open enormous possibilities for the youth and subsistence farmer. There is the youth who shuns away from agriculture and who aspires for becoming an employee after graduation. There is also the subsistence farmer whose mere aspiration is to have food and some cash on a seasonal basis. However, with agripreneurship, there is a change in the offering especially as a contributor to stable livelihood.

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