

FEATURES

GEMMA CHAVEZ : A BUDDING LADY DAIRY FARMER



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By Flordeliza Z. Reyes

Gemma Chavez is 31 years old, single, and a graduate of Computer Management. A member of the PALCON Dairy Multi-Purpose Cooperative, she is employed in a private company and is an epitome of today's empowered women. Physically, you can hardly imagine Gemma choosing dairy farming as a career because she is small and fragile looking. But looks can be deceiving. She has a career in two extremely different worlds - in a four walled air-conditioned office, and in a dairy farm with thirteen head of cattle and developing six hectares of pastureland.

"I've never thought that being a woman is a handicap in doing what men usually dominated" she says. She recalled that when she started in 2004 with only one upgarded Holstein-Brahman, it was really difficult. "I called my first cow Jackie Chan.. No offense meant however to the international action star, because whenever I handmilked her she kicked. I had to tie the two rear feet before milking. When I started milking Jackie Chan I was able to get only about three liters that I patiently carry to the collection center. I did that for one year.", she smiles while recalling her ordeal.

Maybe Jackie Chan felt Gemma was not giving up because the animal's milk production gradually increased. Later, she was able to get about seven liters of milk daily and she felt happy. It was indeed a feat to tame Jackie Chan. Two years later, she was able to increase her herd by purchasing good dairy cattle from her co-members. She was grateful for the training she got from Jackie Chan and the advice she received from veteran dairy farmers such as Jun and Ellen Carriaga, Teddy Panaligan and Ito Basit. Now she finds it easier to take care of a pure Holstein-Friesian, a Jersey and ten (10) Holstein -Sahiwal crosses without an "attitude" to deal with.

Gemma disclosed that she received P22,000.00 from the Palcon Dairy Multi-purpose Cooperative as patronage refund in 2006 compared to the P500.00 that she received when she started in 2004. The patronage refund she earned came from the one peso per liter of milk collected that was deducted from her which served as a "savings" and is received by the member annually. She is expecting nine of her thirteen cows to calve late this year and this will surely boost milk production in her farm. She admitted that the reward of being in the business of dairying is not only monetary but more of self fulfillment.